

THE ARGOSY.

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THE GREY MONK.

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DYKE."

CHAPTER XIII.

CAPTAIN VERINDER AND HIS VISITOR.

WHILE the events bearing on the life-story of Ethel Thursby, as narrated in the last few chapters, were duly working themselves out, certain other events destined to exercise an important influence on her future, the chief factors in which were two people of whose very existence she was unaware, were in process of evolution.

It was eleven o'clock on a bright May morning, and Captain Verinder, who had only lately risen and had but just finished his breakfast, which this morning had consisted of nothing more substantial than a tumbler of rum and milk, was engaged in a rueful examination of the pockets of the suit of clothes he had been wearing the previous evening.

"Not a stiver more," he said, with a grimace, as he tossed his waistcoat across the room; and with that he turned and counted for the second time the little pile of silver and coppers which he had previously extracted from his pockets and placed on the chimney-piece. "Seven shillings and elevenpence-ha'penny, all told," he muttered; "and there's seventeen days yet to be got through before the end of the month."

It was not the first time by many that he had found himself "cornered," but the process became none the pleasanter through repetition.

He turned away with a shrug, and began to charge his meerschaum with the strong tobacco he was in the habit of smoking.

"When we find ourselves in a hole of our own digging, or in a scrape, the result of our own folly, we have a way of telling ourselves that the truest philosophy is to grin and bear it. Of course there's nothing else to be done, but it's only cold pudding at the best." He spoke aloud as he had a way of doing when alone.

"Verinder, my dear boy, if there was ever any man who sold himself

cheap, you were that one last night. Let us hope you will take the lesson to heart, and not carry your nose quite so high in the air in time to come."

Having lighted his pipe, he drew his shabby dressing-gown about him and seated himself in a somewhat dilapidated easy-chair by his open window in Tilney Street, Soho—a narrow thoroughfare of tall, old-fashioned houses that had seen better days.

For anything beyond a small assured income of eighty pounds a year, Captain Verinder had to trust to the exercise of his wits. At this time he was a man of sixty, rather below the medium height, but still slim and upright for his years, and with something that might be termed semi-military in his appearance and carriage. The mental exercise in question took the form of billiards. Although far from being a fine player, his natural aptitude for the game had been cultivated by long practice, till he had attained a degree of proficiency at it which he found to answer his purpose very well indeed. That purpose was neither more nor less than to haunt the public rooms within a wide radius of his lodgings, on the look-out for those simpletons with more money than sense, of whom there is an unfailing supply in big cities, who can only be convinced at the expense of their pocket that in the art of billiard-playing they have not yet got beyond their apprenticeship. The Captain regarded it as a very poor week indeed at the end of which he did not find himself in pocket to the extent of fifty shillings, or three pounds—or rather, would have found himself that sum in pocket but for his ineradicable propensity for treating himself and others to innumerable "drinks" and cigars. When perfectly sober, he was one of the stingiest of mortals, but after his third glass he began to thaw, and, a little later, the veriest stranger would have been welcome to share his last shilling. It is a by no means uncommon trait.

On the evening of the day prior to the one with which we are now concerned, the Captain, in the course of his rounds, had encountered a sheep-faced, but gentlemanly-looking young fellow, in whom he thought he saw an easy prey.

What, then, was his rage and amazement when at the end of the evening the Captain's eyes opened to the fact that it was a case of the biter being bitten, and that the sheep-faced provincial, instead of being the greenhorn he looked, was, in reality, a graduate in the same school as himself.

Small wonder, then, was it that his thoughts this morning were bitter, when, after emptying his pockets, he realised that the absurdly inadequate sum of seven and elevenpence-halfpenny was all that was left him to exist on till the next quarterly payment of his income should fall due, which would not be till between a fortnight and three weeks hence.

He was still smoking moodily when he heard his landlady's shuffling

footsteps on the stairs, and, a moment later, her head was protruded into the room. "If you please, Captain, here's a lady asking for you," said Mrs. Rapp, a Londoner born and bred.

"A lady asking for me? Impossible!" exclaimed the Captain as he started to his feet.

"Not at all impossible, Uncle Augustus," said a full rich voice, and thereupon, following close upon the heels of Mrs. Rapp, there advanced into the room a tall and stately female figure, attired in black. Pausing in the middle of the floor, she raised the veil which had hitherto partially shrouded her features.

The captain stared for a moment or two, and then from his lips broke the one word, "Giovanna!"

"Yes, it is I—your niece Giovanna—come all the way from Italy to see you."

Mrs. Rapp discreetly withdrew.

Notwithstanding her years, which now numbered not far short of forty, Giovanna was still a very handsome woman, with a large and generous style of beauty which would have made her a striking figure anywhere. Although she called the Captain uncle, there was no blood relationship between the two, her mother having been merely Augustus Verinder's step-sister by a previous marriage. They had never met but once before, when the Captain had spent a month at the *osteria* of Giuseppe Rispani, Giovanna being at that time a girl of sixteen. Ever since her desertion of her husband in America she had passed as a widow—la Signora Alessandro. She had not been without offers of marriage meanwhile, but had not seen her way to accept any of them. As to whether her husband was alive or dead, she had no knowledge.

Giuseppe Rispani had recently died, and Vanna, having realised the small fortune bequeathed her by him, had now come to England, which she had long wished to visit.

In the course of the confidential talk that ensued between Vanna and her uncle she was induced by the latter to relate to him all about her marriage, the details of which were quite new to him.

She began by telling him of the arrival of the young Englishman, Mr. Alexander, at Catanzaro; of his long stay at the *osteria* of the Golden Fig; of the coming of two other Englishmen, one of whom proved to be the father of Mr. Alexander, and of their departure next day. Then she proceeded to recount how the young Englishman proposed to her, how she accepted him, and how she did not learn till her marriage-day that her husband's full name was John Alexander Clare. She made no mention of her father's discovery by means of the peephole in the ceiling, but simply said, "I knew before my marriage that my husband's father, on the occasion of his visit, had given him six thousand pounds in English money." Then she went on to tell of the departure of her husband and herself for America, of the death of their child; and of their subsequent separation, which she made out to have been a matter of mutual arrangement; and wound

up by saying, "From that day to this I have heard no tidings of my husband."

"Neither, I'll wager, have you ever made any effort to find out who the father was that could afford to give his son six thousand pounds in order to get rid of him," remarked the Captain when she had come to the end of her narrative.

"No. What business was it of mine?" demanded Vanna with a stare.

"Ah, that's just the point which you have never thought it worth your while to test. Yet, who can say that it might not have proved to be very much your business indeed?"

Then to himself he added: "This seems to me a little matter which may be worth inquiring into. But, good gracious! to think that there should be such imbeciles in the world as this niece of mine!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CAPTAIN TAKES A LITTLE JOURNEY.

THE more Captain Verinder turned over in his mind the chief points of the story told him by his niece, the more convinced he became that it was indeed, as he had remarked to himself at the time, a matter worth inquiring into.

The Captain, when once he had made up his mind to any particular course of action, was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet. His first proceeding was to seek out a certain billiard-room acquaintance of the name of Tring—a man who had got through two fortunes in his time and was now reduced to earning a scanty livelihood by literary hackwork at the British Museum. Having given him the particulars of the information he required, the Captain met him by appointment a couple of days later.

"The only person I can find," said Tring, "of the name specified by you that seems likely to answer to your requirements, is a certain Sir Gilbert Clare, of Withington Chase, Hertfordshire, the representative of one of the oldest titles in the kingdom."

Captain Verinder, having taken a note of the name and address in his pocket-book and paid the other for his trouble, went his way. His next step, the following morning, was to call on Giovanna with a request for the loan of ten pounds.

"'Tis not for myself I ask it," he said with one of the grandiloquent airs in which he sometimes indulged. "It will be expended to the last farthing in your service, my dear. I refrain from saying more at present, save that in the course of a few days I hope to be the bearer of news that will—well, that will astonish you very considerably."

Vanna raised no objection to lending her uncle the amount he

asked for, although by this time she had seen enough of him to feel pretty sure that she would never see a shilling of it back.

In the course of the following day Captain Verinder booked himself by train to Mapleford, which station he had ascertained to be the nearest to the point he was bound for. His object was to try to discover whether the John Alexander Clare whom his niece had married so many years before was in any way related to, or connected with, Sir Gilbert Clare of Withington Chase.

The Captain having located himself at the best hotel, and partaken of a dinner such as had been altogether beyond his means for a long time past, proceeded to take a quiet stroll about the little town, which, however, had nothing of interest to offer for his inspection. Later on he found his way into the coffee-room of the hotel, which place, as he had expected it would, drew to itself in the course of the evening a round dozen or more of the better class of tradespeople and others, all of whom, it was evident, were in the habit of frequently meeting there. Here he found no difficulty in ascertaining everything about Sir Gilbert that it concerned him to know. Thus, he learnt that Sir Gilbert's son by his first marriage had left England, after a quarrel with his father, more than twenty years before, and that, a few years later, news had come to hand that he had lost his life through some accident abroad, only, nobody seemed to know either the nature of the accident in question, or where it had happened. Further, the Captain learnt that the second Lady Clare and her three sons were all dead, and that Sir Gilbert, a broken, childless old man of seventy-four, was living at the Chase in a seclusion that was rarely broken by any visitor from the outside world.

It was on a Friday that the Captain went down to Mapleford, and the following Monday saw him back in town. He had stayed in the country over Sunday in order that he might be present at morning service at the church, just beyond the precincts of the Chase, which Sir Gilbert made a point of attending, and where several generations of his progenitors were buried.

The Captain wanted to see for himself what kind of man Sir Gilbert was. The latter arrived in due course, alone and on foot, and from the place where he sat Verinder had an unimpeded view of him. When service was over the Captain took a stroll round the church, pausing to look at every monument and to read every inscription commemorative of dead and gone members of the Clare family. One inscription, and one only, had any special interest for him. It was that which recorded the death of "John Alexander Clare, eldest son of Sir Gilbert Clare, who was accidentally killed abroad" on such and such a date. "I would wager a hundred pound note to a fiver—if I had one," said the Captain with emphasis, "that this tablet refers to Vanna's husband and to no one else. It's altogether out of the question that there should have been two John Alexander Clares living at the same time. And to think that the young man has been dead

for seventeen years and that his widow has known nothing about it? What a fortunate thing it is for her that she has got a man of the world like me at her back! From this day forward her interests and mine are identical."

A jubilant man was Captain Verinder when he went back to London next day.

About mid-day on Tuesday he called on Giovanna at the boarding-house—one largely frequented by foreigners—at which she had located herself for the time being. That the news of which he was the bearer was a great surprise to her hardly needs to be stated. It was both a surprise and a shock, for although she had never really cared for Alec as a wife should care for her husband, and had left him of her own accord and under most cruel circumstances, through all the years which had intervened since then his image had been often in her thoughts, but it was as a man still living and in the prime of life that he had dwelt in her memory. Consequently, to be told suddenly that he had met with a violent death seventeen years before, which pointed to a time almost immediately after her desertion of him, was enough to thrill her through every fibre of her being.

Well, whatever uncertainty she might heretofore have felt with regard to her husband's fate had no longer any room for existence. She had been a widow all these years without knowing it.

Before long the Captain went on to speak of Sir Gilbert, and to detail all that he had heard in reference to him. He had always been rather clever as an amateur sketcher, and could catch a likeness better than most people, and he now took pencil and paper and with a few bold strokes drew an outline portrait of the baronet. Pushing it across the table to Vanna, he said: "Does that in any way resemble the English *milor* who travelled all the way to Catanzaro to see the Mr. John Alexander who became your husband a little later?"

"Yes, that is the man," said Vanna quietly when she had examined the sketch.

"Ah; I thought as much," remarked her uncle drily.

"And now that you have found out all this about Sir Gilbert Clare, in what way does it, or can it, affect me?" queried Vanna presently.

The Captain regarded her with a pitying smile, as he might a child who had asked him some utterly preposterous question.

"Cannot you see that the fact of your father-in-law being a rich and childless man may be made—I say *made*—to affect your fortunes very materially—very materially indeed? That is," he added a moment after, "if you only know how to put the knowledge thus acquired to a practical use."

Giovanna shook her head. It was evident that she could not in the least comprehend what her uncle was driving at.

The Captain's shoulders went up nearly to his ears. "What a very fortunate thing it is, my dear, that at such an important crisis of your life you have by your side a thorough man of the world like myself

—and one so completely devoted to your interests ! Were you my own child I could not entertain a greater regard and affection for you than I do."

Vanna sat grandly unmoved, her statuesque features betraying no slightest trace of emotion

"As cold as a marble goddess," muttered the Captain under his breath as he produced his cigar case, for he was a man who regarded smoking as one of the necessities of existence.

For a little space he smoked in silence ; then all at once he said, as if it were an echo of some thought he had been revolving in his mind : "What a pity, what an enormous pity it is, that your child did not live till now !"

A sudden spasm, gone almost as soon as it had come, contracted the muscles of Vanna's face ; her teeth bit hard into her underlip ; but never a word answered she.

"Come," said the Captain a few minutes later ; "put on your things and let us go for a stroll in the Park. It's a lovely afternoon, and there will be no end of swells in the Row."

Nothing loth was Giovanna to comply. As yet she had seen hardly anything of London, and what she had seen had not impressed her over favourably. It had been one of the dreams of her life to see Hyde Park in the height of the season, and now her dream was about to be fulfilled. In ten minutes she was ready to set out.

The Captain chartered a hansom—it was the first time his niece had been in one—telling the driver to take his time and go by way of Regent Street and Piccadilly. Here at length was London as Vanna had imagined it to be.

As the Captain had prophesied, the Row was crowded. They strolled about for a while in the warm sunshine, and then found a couple of chairs whence they could take in the varied features of the passing show at their leisure. A proud man was Captain Verinder that day. In all that gay and fashionable throng there were not, in his opinion, more than three or four women who in point of looks were fit to be matched with the one by his side—that is to say (to compare one thing with another), if a rose may be considered to be in the perfection of its beauty when it is fully blown, and not when it is merely a blushing bud of undeveloped possibilities. Although nearing her fortieth birthday, Giovanna—unlike the majority of her countrywomen, who age early—was remarkably young-looking for her years. But then she was English on her mother's side, and that may have had something to do with the matter. She was wearing a charming half-mourning costume, with bonnet to match, which she had bought since her arrival in London. Many were the glances of admiration of which she was the recipient, many the heads that were turned for a second look at her tall figure, so stately and yet so graceful, with her pale classic features, clear-cut as some antique gem, as she threaded her way through the crowd with the proud composed air of

one "to the manner born." Well might Captain Verinder feel proud of his charge.

"Do you see that *blasé*-looking man driving that pair of splendid chestnuts?" he said to Vanna a few minutes after they had sat down. "He is Lord Elvaston, one of the greatest *roués* about town. He used to know me well enough before he came into his fortune a score of years ago, when he was not above borrowing a five-pound note from anybody who would lend him one. Now, of course, he passes me as if he had never set eyes on me in his life. But such is the way of the world, more especially of the world of fashion."

Then a few minutes later, "Note that painted woman in the too palpable wig being driven slowly past in her yellow chariot. That is Lady Anne Baxendale. Her father was only a country rector on three hundred a year. The rectory grounds adjoined those of the house where I was born. Your mother, when a girl, and little Nan Cotsmore were great friends. I've seen them play skipping-rope by the hour together."

But Verinder had another motive in view in thus introducing his niece to one of the most striking spectacles which the metropolis has to offer for the delectation of the strangers within its gates. He wanted to excite in her bosom a feeling which should be compounded in about equal measure of envy and discontent—envy of those who, although, for the passing hour, she seemed as one of themselves, were yet as far removed from her by their wealth and position as if she and they were inhabitants of two totally different spheres (which, indeed, in one sense, they were); and discontent with the humble and prosaic surroundings of her own obscure existence. If he had read Giovanna aright, it seemed to him that it ought not to be a difficult matter to foment within her the very undesirable sentiments in question.

"Are you sorry, my dear, that I brought you here this afternoon?" he asked, after a longer pause than common.

"Sorry! oh no, how could I be? It is a beautiful sight. Nay, it is more than beautiful, it is magnificent. This is London as I used to dream of it."

"But never, I'll wager, with any thought that it might possibly one day become a reality to you."

"A reality, you mean, as far as it can become such to one who, like myself, is a mere looker-on."

"When I spoke of its becoming a reality to you, I did not mean merely as a spectator, but as an actor in the show—a recognised actor in it and acknowledged as one of themselves by the 'smartest' people here."

Giovanna turned two deep wondering eyes on the Captain.

"You talk in riddles, Uncle," she said quietly.

"You seem to forget, my dear—or rather, perhaps, I ought to say that you fail sufficiently to realise in your thoughts—the position which is, or ought to be, yours by right of your marriage with the late

John Alexander Clare. You are the widow of the heir of Withington Chase, the daughter-in-law of a wealthy baronet of ancient family. As such, your proper position is there—there, as one of the glittering throng passing and repassing before our eyes. You ought to be riding in your own brougham or barouche, with your own coachman and footman. You ought to be wearing the family diamonds—who has so much right to them as you?—and where is there another woman who would show them off to better advantage? You ought to have your own little establishment in town, with your own servants—say, a flat of six or seven rooms somewhere in Belgravia, where you could invite your old uncle to come and see you as often as you might feel inclined for his company. I repeat, that all these things ought of right to be yours."

Giovanna's nostrils dilated, a hard cold glitter came into her eyes, her bosom began to rise and fall more quickly than it was wont to do; there was a chord in her somewhat lymphatic nature which responded to her uncle's words. Her own diamonds, her own carriage, her own establishment in London, and, above all, to be transformed from a nobody into a Somebody, and to have the great world of rank and fashion recognise her as one of themselves! Oh, it was too much! The vision was too dazzling. A low cry, half of pain, half of pleasure, broke from her. The Captain was watching her out of a corner of his eye. But presently a chill struck her and her face blanched a little. Turning to Verinder, she said:

"But you seem to have forgotten, Uncle, that Sir Gilbert Clare does not so much as know of my existence—nay, the chances are that he was not even aware that his son was ever married."

"But I mean him to be made aware both of one fact and the other before he is very much older," responded the Captain with a sinister smile. "Ah! a spot or two of rain. We had better be moving." Then, as they rose: "There is only one course open to us, Vanna *mia*," he whispered meaningly, "and that is, to find Sir Gilbert an heir."

CHAPTER XV.

CONSPIRATORS THREE.

WHEN Captain Verinder enunciated the startling statement with which the last chapter concludes, he had already conceived a certain scheme in his brain, which, in the course of next day, he took the first steps towards reducing to practice, but without saying a word to his niece of his intentions.

Many years before, Giovanna's only brother, Luigi Rispani, had come to London by way of advancing his fortunes. He was energetic and persevering, with a gift for languages, and after a time he obtained the post of foreign correspondent in a city house of business.

A little later he married a country-woman of his own, and then, after a few years, both he and his wife died, leaving one son behind them who was named after his father. This son was now about twenty years old, a dark-eyed, good-looking, quick-witted young fellow, but having within him the germs of certain scampish propensities, which, up till now, had only been able to develop themselves after a weak and tentative fashion. Luigi earned his living in part as drawing-master to a number of cheap suburban boarding-schools, and in part, when his other duties were over for the day, by acting as check-taker at one of the West End theatres.

The Captain and the elder Rispani had been on fairly intimate terms, and after the latter's death he had never altogether lost sight of the lad. Sometimes, when he had been more than usually lucky at billiards, he would look up young Luigi and treat him to a dinner of four or five courses at some foreign restaurant in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, and at parting press a couple of half-crowns into his unreluctant palm. Verinder, who by long habit had become a tolerably shrewd reader of character, had long ago summed up in his mind the most salient characteristics of Luigi Rispani, and he now said to himself, with a pleasant sense of elation: "Here is the very tool I need ready to my hand. If I were to search London round I could not find one that would suit my purpose better."

This evening he sought out Luigi at the theatre where the young man was engaged, and after shaking hands with him, said: "I wish to see you most particularly. Come to my den after you have finished here and I will tell you what I want you for."

Luigi went straight from the theatre to his uncle's rooms. (As long as he could remember he had been used to calling the Captain "uncle"). The ghostly light of dawn was in the eastern sky before the two separated. The nature of the business discussed by them will be made clear by a conversation which took place next day between the Captain and his niece.

"You have not forgotten our talk in the Park the day before yesterday?" said the former.

"There was much in it which I am not likely readily to forget. All the same, you said certain things which, the more I think of them, the more extravagant and incapable of ever being realised they seem to me."

"That is just what I am here to-day to endeavour to disprove," remarked the Captain in his dryest tones. "You don't object to my smoking, I know. Thanks."

As soon as he had selected and lighted a cigar, he resumed:

"You already know my views as to the position which, in my opinion, you ought to occupy as daughter-in-law to Sir Gilbert Clare of Withington Chase. That you have an undoubted claim on the old baronet I think very few people would be found to dispute, and the question we have now to consider is the most desirable mode

of urging that claim upon his notice in order that the utmost possible advantage may accrue to you therefrom. As you justly remarked the other day, the probability is that Sir Gilbert was never made aware of his son's marriage, and, consequently, cannot have the remotest suspicion that the young man left a widow to mourn his loss. Now, from all I heard of the baronet when I was in the country last week, I take him to be a hardfisted, penurious curmudgeon, who, to judge from his style of living, must be laying by several thousands a year—though, why he should care to do so, goodness only knows, seeing that he has nobody he cares about to leave his savings to—the next heir being a half-cousin with whom he has been at outs for the last thirty years. Now, it seems to me, taking into account the kind of man he is, that if you were to introduce yourself to his notice merely on the ground of being the widow of his son—who died nearly twenty years ago—and a person of whom probably he has never heard before, he might perhaps, without wholly ignoring your claim upon him, not merely satisfy his conscience, but persuade himself into the belief that he was acting a most generous part by you, if he were to allow you a paltry hundred, or, at the most, a couple of hundred pounds a year as long as he lives. But, Giovanna, my dear, it is more—much more—than that that I want to help you to secure for yourself. I want to see you in the position which would have been yours at your husband's death had you married John Alexander Clare with his father's full knowledge and consent. In that case you would undoubtedly have had a jointure of not less than seven or eight hundred a year, and I want us two to try whether we cannot see our way to secure something like an equivalent settlement for you, even after all this length of time."

Vanna was staring straight before her with an introspective expression in her midnight orbs. When the silence had lasted some time, she said very quietly :

"You are working out some scheme in your brain, Uncle, I feel sure of it ; you have something more to tell me—something to propose. Is it not so ?"

He considered the ash of his cigar for a moment or two, then, lifting his eyes to her face, he said :

"What a pity—what a very great pity it is that your boy did not live to be here to-day !"

As before, when he spoke of the loss of her child, an indescribable expression flitted across Giovanna's face.

"That is precisely what you said the other day," she remarked, coldly. "Where is the use of referring a second time to a misfortune which happened so long ago ?"

"Because I cannot help contrasting your position to-day with what it would have been could you but have taken your boy by the hand, and have said to Sir Gilbert : 'You lost your son and heir long years ago : but to-day I bring you a grandson to take his place. Here is

the new heir of Withington Chase.' In that case, how the old man would have welcomed you!—nothing would have seemed too good for you, so overjoyed would he have been. The position which ought to have been yours from the first would then be accorded you, and you would take your place in society as the daughter-in-law of Sir Gilbert Clare, and the mother of the next heir. And then, a little later, my Vanna, you would marry again. Oh, yes, you would! Marry money—and perhaps a title to boot. Why not? You are one of the handsomest women in London, or else I don't know a handsome woman when I see one!"

Vanna rose abruptly from her chair, and then sat down again. For once she was profoundly moved.

"Oh, Uncle, this is the merest folly!" she cried. "Why talk of impossibilities? Let us keep to realities. I thought you had something to propose—something, perhaps, that would——"

"So I have, my dear; so I have something to propose," responded the Captain, with a chuckle. "What I said to you the other day was, 'There is only one course open to us, and that is to find Sir Gilbert an heir.'"

"Well?" demanded Vanna with wide-open eyes. "I failed to understand your meaning then and I am not a bit the wiser now."

"Listen then. Although, owing to circumstances to which I need not further refer, we are not in a position to go before Sir Gilbert and produce the real heir, is that any reason why we should not find a substitute who would answer both his purpose and ours just as well as the genuine article?" His cunning eyes were watching her eagerly.

Vanna's face expressed a growing wonder, but it was a wonder largely compounded of bewilderment.

"*Ecoulez*," resumed her uncle. "Let us assume for the moment that you agree with me what a very desirable thing it would be to provide Sir Gilbert with an heir, even though it would, of necessity, have to be a fictitious one. Being, then, so far in accord, naturally the first question would be, 'But where are we to find the heir in question—or rather, someone by whom he could be personated?' To which I should reply that I am prepared at any moment to lay my finger on the one person out of all the hundreds and thousands of people in this big city best suited to our purpose. That person is none other than your own nephew (whom I believe you have never yet set eyes on), the son of your only brother, Luigi Rispani."

Sheer amazement kept Giovanna silent.

"I have already seen Luigi and sounded him in the matter," resumed the Captain. "He fully agrees with me that the idea is a most admirable one, and one which, if carried out in all its details with that care and foresight which I should not fail to bestow on it, could not prove otherwise than brilliantly successful. In short, Luigi places himself unreservedly in my hands. So now, my dear Vanna, it only remains for you to follow your nephew's excellent example."

It is not needful that we should recount in detail what further passed between uncle and niece either at this or subsequent interviews. Enough to say that when once she had been talked over into giving her consent, and had thoroughly mastered the details of the scheme as proposed to be carried out by her uncle, she entered fully into the affair, and seemed to have thrown whatever moral scruples might at one time have feebly held her back completely to the winds. But before all this came about Luigi Rispani and his aunt had been brought together. Although English blood on the female side ran in the veins of both, they might have been pure Italians for anything in their looks which proclaimed the contrary. In point of fact, there was a very marked family likeness between the two, so much so, indeed, that the Captain could not help saying to himself with a chuckle, "Nobody seeing them together, would take them for other than mother and son."

At length all the details of the scheme were so far elaborated and agreed upon by our three conspirators that Verinder felt the time had come for him to make his first important move, which was, to seek an interview with Sir Gilbert Clare, or, as he preferred to express it, to "beard the lion in his den."

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW SIR GILBERT RECEIVED THE NEWS.

It is to be hoped that the reader has not quite forgotten the existence of Everard Lisle.

After Ethel Thursby's refusal of him on her eighteenth birthday he went back with a sad heart to his duties at Withington Chase. There he had rooms in the house of Mr. Kinaby, the land steward, an old red brick house situated a little way outside the precincts of the park. Mr. Kinaby's health had been failing for some time, and Everard was gradually taking over the greater part of his duties. Every morning he went to the Chase to see to Sir Gilbert's correspondence and take his instructions in reference to the estate and other matters. But he had still other duties to attend to. In addition to being a numismatist of some note and a collector of curios, Sir Gilbert of late years had developed into an antiquarian and archaeologist, and for some time past had been engaged in putting together the framework of what he intended ultimately to elaborate into an exhaustive history of the "hundred" of the county in which the Chase was situated, as natives of which his ancestors for three centuries back had played more or less conspicuous parts. In furtherance of this labour of love, for such it was to him, he found Everard very useful in the way of hunting up authorities, making extracts and transcribing his notes into a caligraphy which it would be possible for a compositor to set up—when, at some as yet unknown date, the great work should be

sufficiently advanced to be sent to press—without having to tear his hair in the process.

Sir Gilbert, whom advancing years had tended to render more of a recluse than ever, had gradually, and by a process of which he himself was scarcely conscious, begun to entertain a great liking (in his frigid, undemonstrative way) for this frank-eyed, clear-headed, straightforward young man, in whom he could detect no faintest trace of sycophancy, and who knew so well how to retain the full measure of his own self-respect without in any way grating against the *amour-propre* of his employer. Lisle had evolved a happy faculty of managing the lonely cantankerous old man, for whom he often felt a profound pity, as no one before had ever succeeded in managing him. Thus it had come to pass that a week never went by without Everard being asked to dine once, and frequently oftener, at the Chase. On these occasions, when dinner was over, the old man and the young one would wind up the evening by playing a few sober games of chess or backgammon, at both of which Sir Gilbert was an adept. By the time the turret clock struck ten, Everard would be strolling back through the park in the direction of his rooms, with no company save a cigar and his own thoughts. At such seasons, with the fresh night air blowing about him, with the stars raining down sweet influences upon him, and with the huge ghost-like trees to sentinel him on his way, whither ought a young man's thoughts to wing their flight save to the one fair being, fairer to him than all the world beside, who holds captive his heart, a willing prisoner!

But, in Everard's case, she who still held his heart captive did so all unwittingly. She had rejected his proffered love and all was at an end between them. He could never hope to win her for his wife, but that seemed to him no reason, however little such a course might recommend itself to his cooler judgment, why he should not go on loving her just as he had done all along. In any case, he did go on loving her, nor did it seem possible to him that a time should ever come when he could do otherwise. He knew that in all human probability the day was not far distant when he should hear the news of her marriage with another, and he tried to school himself by anticipation, so that when the shock should come, he might be enabled to bear it with manly equanimity.

On a certain morning, as Sir Gilbert Clare and Everard Lisle were engaged together in the library at Withington Chase, a servant entered carrying a highly-glazed card on a salver. "I have shown the gentleman into the morning-room, sir," said the man as he presented the card.

Sir Gilbert took it and adjusted his pince-nez. "Captain Verinder," he read aloud. "Have no recollection of anyone of that name. Um-um. I suppose I must go and see what he wants me for." Then, to the man, "Tell Captain Verinder I will be with him immediately."

The Captain had come down from town by an early train and had made his way on foot from the railway station to the Chase. He had not seen anything of the old mansion on the occasion of his previous visit, and as he drew near, approaching it by way of the drive, he could not help being much impressed, not merely by its size and the noble simplicity of its façade, but by the old-time air of stately, if somewhat faded, dignity which seemed as integral a part of it as the ivy which clung round its gables and chimneys, or the patches of many-coloured lichen with which time had encrusted its high-pitched roof. Nor was this impression lessened when, in response to his summons, a servant in livery opened wide the great double doors, and having taken his card, ushered him through the big echoing hall, hung with trophies of war and the chase, into a charming room furnished in the Empire style—although, to be sure, the gilding was tarnished and the coverings of chairs and lounges considerably the worse for wear—which looked out through its long windows on a gay parterre of flowers, and was shut in with a sort of sweet privacy by a semi-circular hedge of laurel and box. And here Sir Gilbert found his visitor some three minutes later.

The Captain, it may be remembered, had only seen the baronet once before, on that Sunday morning when he took account of him in his high-backed pew at church. Now that he beheld him close at hand, he could not help saying to himself, "What a grand wreck of a man!—and what a splendid fellow he must have been in his prime!" And indeed, although Sir Gilbert's one-time height of six feet two inches was now slightly curtailed owing to the burden of his years, he still towered above most people with whom he came in contact, as though he were descended from some heroic race of old, while his shaggy brows, his white drooping moustache, his high thin nose and his eyes still luminous with a sort of untamed fire, lent to his aspect a something of leonine majesty.

"Captain Verinder, I presume," said Sir Gilbert as he advanced, holding the other's card between his thumb and forefinger. The Captain bowed. "You have—a—um—the advantage of me, sir. But pray be seated." His keen critical eyes were taking Verinder in from head to foot as he spoke. It was a scrutiny which, despite his coolness and his habitual indifference to the opinion of others, somewhat disconcerted the latter.

"I have taken the liberty of intruding upon you, Sir Gilbert," he began, as he drew forward a chair and gave a little preliminary cough behind his hand, "in order that I may have an opportunity of laying before you certain information which has only quite recently come into my possession, but which, I feel sure, when you have been made aware of it, you will agree with me is of the greatest possible importance."

Sir Gilbert opened his eyes a little wider than usual. "Pray proceed, sir," he said stiffly.

"The information to which I refer bears especially on certain

incidents in the life of your late son and heir, Mr. John Alexander Clare."

On the instant Sir Gilbert's figure became as rigid as a ramrod. His lips opened and then shut again without a sound.

"Unless my information is at fault," resumed the Captain, "the last occasion on which you and your son met was when, accompanied by another gentleman, you stopped for a few hours at Catanzaro in Calabria, at which place Mr. Clare was then residing."

Sir Gilbert contented himself with bowing a grave assent. His face just then was a puzzle.

"Shortly afterwards Mr. Clare emigrated to the United States, and there, between two and three years later, he unfortunately met with his death through an accident." Here the Captain paused and looked questionably at Sir Gilbert.

"Your information, Mr—er—Captain Verinder, is quite correct as far as it goes," said the latter as if in response to the look. "Still, I fail to see in what way—er—in short——"

"Why I, a stranger, have had the impertinence to come here and talk to you about matters which, as you doubtless think, can be no possible concern of mine," interposed Verinder coolly. "That is the precise point, Sir Gilbert, as to which I now propose to enlighten you."

Drawing his chair a few inches closer to that of Sir Gilbert he resumed:

"I have merely recapitulated certain facts already known to you in order that I might thereby be enabled to lead up to certain other facts which, as I have every reason to believe, have never been brought under your cognisance."

He paused for a moment as if to allow his next words to gather force thereby.

"Sir, is it within your knowledge that when your son left Italy for America he took with him—a wife?"

At these words Sir Gilbert's jaw dropped, a curious glaze came over his eyes and his fingers began to twitch spasmodically. The Captain sprang to his feet; he was on the point of ringing for help, but a gesture on the part of the baronet restrained him.

"I shall be better in a minute or two," he said in a hoarse whisper. Verinder crossed to the window. Two or three minutes passed, then a hollow changed voice said: "What proof have you that your most strange statement is true?"

"The most convincing of all proofs, Sir Gilbert—a living one. Your son's wife—or widow, as I ought rather to term her—is in London at this moment."

"Alive?—and I have known nothing of her existence all these years! It is incredible, sir—incredible. I am being made the victim of some vile conspiracy."

"Conspiracy, indeed! Nothing of the kind, sir, I give you my

word—the word of an officer and a gentleman—hem ! I condescend to overlook your words, Sir Gilbert, in consideration of the singularity of the circumstances, otherwise——”

The rest of the sentence was drowned in a cough. He said no more, but twisted one end of his moustache viciously, and scowled at the chandelier.

“It is incredible,” Sir Gilbert kept murmuring under his breath without heeding Verinder. The latter waited patiently. One half his tale, and that the more amazing half, had yet to be told. At length Sir Gilbert seemed to pull himself together. Turning on his visitor a face which seemed even more sternly set than usual, he said : “Assuming for the moment, sir, the accuracy of what you have just told me—which, mind you, at present I am by no means prepared to admit—will you be good enough to inform me who and what the— the person was with whom my son was so foolishly weak as to contract a secret marriage.”

It was a question for which the Captain had prepared himself, and he answered it on the moment.

“The lady in question was born in Italy, her father being a native of that country, and her mother an Englishwoman. Signor Rispani was a scion of an impoverished patrician family which can boast of I know not how many quarterings with other families as noble as itself.”

This latter statement, it may be remarked, was a deliberate invention on the Captain’s part. He had calculated that it would not be without its effect on the baronet, as also that the latter, in all probability, had never heard the name of Rispani, or, if he had heard it during his brief sojourn at Catanzaro, that he had long ago forgotten it.

“Um—um. And the young woman’s mother—what of her ? You say she was an Englishwoman.”

“Her mother, Sir Gilbert Clare, was my sister,” replied the Captain as he laid his hand over the region of his heart and bent his head, while his look said as plainly as words, “After that statement, it would be nothing less than an impertinence on your part to inquire further.”

Sir Gilbert bowed with his most courtly air. “Thank you very much, Captain Verinder,” he said. Then, after stroking his chin for a few seconds, he went on : “May I ask, sir, whether your visit here to-day is with the knowledge and sanction of your niece—that is to say of the—the lady whom you allege to be the widow of my son ?”

“Had my visit not been undertaken at her express desire, it would not have taken place at all.”

“Um. Then will it be thought presumptuous on my part to ask by what particular motive your niece is actuated in asking you, after a silence which has lasted nearly a score of years, to bring under my notice certain facts hitherto, I admit, unknown to me, but which, for anything which has yet been advanced to the contrary, might just

as well have been left in the oblivion to which, apparently, they have for so long a time been consigned."

There was a veiled insolence in this request, or so it seemed to Verinder, which sent an angry flush mounting to the very roots of his dyed hair. It was only by a supreme effort that he succeeded in keeping back the retort that rose to his lips. Not till he had drawn several breaths did he trust himself to reply. Then he said: "Should you condescend, Sir Gilbert, to grant my niece an interview, you will find her amply prepared to furnish you with such an explanation of her long silence as, I venture to think, you will find it impossible to cavil at. But the one great reason which has induced her, at what may be called the eleventh hour, to rake certain facts out of oblivion, as you have so expressively termed it, and bring them before you, is, because it seems to her an imperative duty that you should no longer be left in ignorance of the existence of your grandson—of the son of your son, the late John Alexander Clare."

"What is that you say?" almost shrieked Sir Gilbert. "A grandson! the child of my son Alec—and alive!"

"Very much alive, Sir Gilbert, if you will allow me to say so," returned the Captain, with something between a grin and a sneer. "And as fine, and handsome, and clever a young man as you would find in a day's march."

Sir Gilbert lay back in his chair, his chin drooping on his breast and his eyes closed. His face was of a ghastly pallor, his lips moved inaudibly. In the shock of Verinder's news he had forgotten the man's presence. An invisible hand had snatched him away. He was there in body but for the time his spirit was elsewhere.

The Captain was biting his nails and regarding him furtively. "How will he take it?" he asked himself. "I have a presentiment that my little scheme will result in a brilliant success. For all Sir Gilbert looks as strong as some gnarled old monarch of the woods, who can say whether he's sound at the core? Looks are deceptive things, and at his age he might go off at a day's notice—nay, without any notice at all. It was nothing less than a stroke of genius to represent Vanna's father as belonging to the old Italian nobility. It touched him in a weak spot. Vanna must on no account forget that she is no longer an innkeeper's daughter, but a person of much greater consequence. Well, I will give her credit for one thing; as far as looks and bearing go, she might be a princess born, or the daughter of a duke. Ah! who comes now?"

The question was elicited by a discreet tap at the door, which was followed, an instant later, by the entrance of a servant.

"If you please, Sir Gilbert," said the man, "Lady Nelthorpe has called and would like to see you. Her ladyship wished me to say that she won't detain you more than five minutes."

The sound of the man's voice served to break Sir Gilbert's waking

trance. He opened his eyes, gave a little start, and grasping an arm of his chair with either hand, he drew himself into an upright position. Next moment he was himself again.

"Repeat your message," he said to the man in his usual curt, imperious tones; and when that had been done, he said: "Tell her ladyship that I will be with her in three minutes," adding, *sotto voce*, "Plague take the woman! she never calls on me except when she wants to cozen me out of a cheque for one or other of her preposterous projects."

Then his eyes turned to Verinder, who had drawn his chair somewhat aside on the entrance of the servant, and as he did so, the expression of his face changed.

"Pardon me," he said, "if for the moment I had forgotten your presence. I am getting into years," he added with a faint sigh, "and at times—only at times, mind you—my memory fails me somewhat. The news you have brought me, Captain—er—er—Dear me, how annoying!"

"Verinder," suggested the other.

"To be sure, to be sure. The news you have brought me, Captain Verinder, is of such a surprising kind that I may be pardoned if I find myself unable all at once to realise it as something within the bounds of possibility. It—it seems like an incident culled from some romance." Here he rose to his feet. There was a strange yearning look in his eyes as he turned and faced the Captain. "Do you mean to assure me, sir, on your word as a man of honour," he said in a voice the deep impressiveness of which was not without a touch of pathos, "that you are prepared to produce before me a young man whom you will vouch for as being the offspring of my son John Alexander Clare?"

Laying a hand over his heart, the Captain, who had also risen, said with grave solemnity: "On my word of honour, Sir Gilbert Clare, that is what I am prepared to do. Your grandson shall be produced before you whensoever and wheresoever may be most convenient to you."

Sir Gilbert took a turn or two in silence. Many memories were at work within him. "No, I will not see the young man just yet. Bring his mother first and let me see and question her. There are several points that will have to be cleared up to my satisfaction before—before—— But I need say no more at present."

"Will you be good enough, Sir Gilbert, to name a time for your interview with my niece?"

"To-morrow at eleven, if that will suit you and her." Then he added under his breath: "Ah, if my faithful, shrewd old Page were only here to help me to investigate this business! The longer I live the more I miss him."

CHAPTER XVII.

SIR GILBERT AND GIOVANNA.

PUNCTUALLY at eleven o'clock next forenoon Captain Verinder, accompanied by his niece, alighted from the fly which had conveyed them from the railway station, at the foot of the flight of semi-circular steps leading to the portico which sheltered the main entrance to the mansion of Withington Chase.

So elated had the Captain been by the result of his interview with Sir Gilbert, that, after detailing to his niece on his return all that had passed between them, he had insisted that she, he and Luigi should all dine together in a private room at a certain popular restaurant (of course at Vanna's expense), when he did not fail to toast Sir Gilbert in a bumper of Clicquot. "Here's to your grandsire, my boy," he said to Luigi as he drained his glass; then, having refilled it, he added: "And here's to the coming lord of Withington Chase, and may he never forget all that his old uncle has done for him!"

A little later he remarked: "I don't think it will be long, my boy, before you come into your inheritance. The old man's breaking up, that's plainly to be seen. I shouldn't be surprised if the next winter tries him severely. He coughed several times during our interview, and a very hollow cough it was."

"And when he is dead and gone, shall I be Sir Luigi Clare?" asked the young man.

"Sir Luigi Clare!" echoed the Captain. "There's a point, now, which I had completely overlooked, while flattering myself that I had forgotten nothing. You will come into the title of course on Sir Gilbert's death. But Sir Luigi Clare will never do. It's altogether too outlandish. We must re-christen you, and that at once."

"Why not make English of the name by turning Luigi into Lewis?" demanded Giovanna.

"The very thing!" replied the Captain. "Which goes to prove that two heads are better than one—especially, my dear, when one of them happens to belong to your sex. Now I come to think, among other inscriptions in the little church at the Chase was one to the memory of a certain Colonel Lewis Clare who fell in some battle or other a long time ago. Now, what more natural," he went on with a meaning look at Luigi, "than that your *father*, instead of naming you after himself, should have preferred to call you after his brave ancestor? Yes, Lewis Clare will do very well indeed—Sir Lewis that will be later on."

Although Giovanna's only visible betrayal of the fact was by a touch of unwonted pallor in her cheeks, she was the prey of a dozen conflicting emotions as the doors of Withington Chase were flung wide and she and her uncle crossed the threshold. "And this was my

husband's home when a boy," was her first thought as her gaze wandered round the entrance hall. "How little I suspected such a thing! There must have been some powerful motive at work to cause him to quit such a roof and to change his name and marry an inn-keeper's daughter and seek a new home thousands of miles away. What was that motive, I wonder?"

"Will you come this way, please," said the trained voice of the man in livery a second later, and with that they were presently shown into the same morning-room into which the Captain had been ushered the day before.

"And now, my dear, the crucial moment is at hand," said the Captain to Vanna as soon as they were alone. "I hope you have forgotten none of the points in which I have so carefully coached you up."

"I don't think there is much fear of that. I never forget anything which it is essential that I should remember."

"One last caution, however. Take your time in answering Sir Gilbert's questions, and, above all things, don't get flurried."

"Did you ever know me to get flurried, Uncle Verinder?"

"No, 'pon my word, I don't think I ever did. But then I have known you such a very short while."

At this juncture the door opened and Sir Gilbert entered the room.

The Captain and Vanna both rose as he came slowly forward, his eyes fixed scrutinisingly on his daughter-in-law. Her stately presence and the classic beauty of her features impressed him at the first glance, and therewith came a sudden *bouleversement* of all his preconceived notions of what she would be like. On the spot he acknowledged to himself that he had done her an injustice in his thoughts. After favouring Verinder with a curt nod of recognition, he went up to Giovanna and held out his hand with an air of old-fashioned courtesy. "Am I to presume, madam, that I see before me the widow of my late son, John Alexander Clare?"

"That was my husband's full name, Sir Gilbert—the name he was married in—although, for reasons of his own, he chose to be known to the world simply as Mr. John Alexander."

"To be sure—to be sure." The rich full contralto of her voice sounded pleasantly in his ears. "That was a fact well-known to me at the time. But pray be seated." A wave of his hand included Verinder in the invitation.

He had dropped Giovanna's hand, and there had been a sudden change in his tone as he spoke the last words. The fact was that he had caught the Captain smiling and rubbing one hand within the other with an air of supreme satisfaction, although the other had certainly not intended that he should do anything of the kind, and therewith he had chilled under a sudden breath of suspicion. "What, after all, if I am being victimised by a couple of schemers!" he said

to himself. "And yet that any woman with such a face as that should lend herself—— No, no—I cannot believe it."

Both the others could see that some change had come over him, but were at a loss to guess the cause of it.

"And where was it, madam, if I may be allowed to ask, that you first made the acquaintance of my son?"

"At Catanzaro, Sir Gilbert."

"So—so. Alec's long stay in that, to me, detestable hole of a place is now explained." This was said half to himself. "And where, madam, were you and my son united in the bonds of matrimony?"

"We were married at Malta, at the English church there."

"Ah, then you are a Protestant!"

Giovanna gravely inclined her head. "My father was a Roman Catholic, but my mother was an Englishwoman and a Protestant. My only brother was brought up in the faith of his father, I in that of my mother."

"So much the better—so much the better," ejaculated Sir Gilbert, quite unaware that the words were spoken aloud.

It was a fact that Giovanna had been married at the English church at Valetta, but a prior ceremony had been gone through at Catanzaro, at which a Romish priest had been the celebrant, for Giuseppe Rispani was too good a Catholic, or had the reputation of being one, not to insist upon his daughter being married in accordance with the rites and ceremonies of his own church. That being done, he had raised no objection to accompanying the young couple as far as Malta (to him, indeed, it was a pleasure trip with all expenses paid), there to give away the bride when the ceremony was gone through for the second time. After that Rispani had bidden his daughter good-bye and gone back home, first, however, borrowing a couple of hundred pounds from his English son-in-law in order, as he averred, that he might have the means of carrying out certain much needed alterations and improvements in the *osteria* of the Golden Fig. It is to be feared, however, that the amount in question never got any further than his own pocket.

After the departure of Rispani the newly-wedded couple had made the best of their way to the United States.

To return.

"In that case, madam," resumed the baronet after a brief pause, "you have doubtless been at pains to preserve your marriage certificate."

Giovanna had preserved it, had, in fact, brought it with her this morning. She now produced it, a creased and faded-looking document, from the satchel suspended from her waist-belt, opened it and handed it to Sir Gilbert; who, having adjusted his pince-nez and drawn his chair up to the centre table, smoothed out the certificate upon it and proceeded to read it slowly and carefully from beginning to end,

his lips shaping each word silently as he spoke it to himself. It purported to be, and was a duly certified copy of the entry in the register of the Protestant church at Valetta of the marriage solemnised on the date specified between John Alexander Clare and Giovanna Rispani. It would have been idle to dispute its genuineness, even had there been any inclination, which was far from being the case, on Sir Gilbert's part to do so.

"Madam, the document seems to me in every respect satisfactory," he said gravely as he refolded it and handed it back to Giovanna with a bow.

In return she put into his hands a framed photograph of herself and her husband, taken within a few days of their marriage. "Possibly, Sir Gilbert, this may not be without some interest for you," she said in her quiet, measured tones.

The old man took the photograph and carried it to the window. Scarcely was his back turned before the Captain flashed a look at Vanna which said, "Everything, so far, going on first-rate."

One, two, three minutes were ticked off by the clock on the chimney-piece before Sir Gilbert came back to his chair. His hand trembled a little as he returned the photograph to Giovanna. "Yes, that is Alec to the life," he said. "Poor boy! poor boy!" A deep sigh broke from him as he resumed his seat.

For a little space no one spoke.

It was Sir Gilbert who broke the silence. "Unless I am misinformed, madam, you and your husband found your way to the United States no long time after your marriage?"

"We did, Sir Gilbert. And here a little point occurs to me about which it may be as well to enlighten you. Up to the morning of our marriage I had never known my husband by any other name than John Alexander. The only explanation proffered by him after the ceremony was over was, that he had deemed it best, for certain private reasons, to temporarily drop his surname. As to the nature of his reasons, he never enlightened me, and, indeed, so little curious was I to learn them that, as far as I now remember, the subject was never again broached between us, and after our arrival in America we were known simply as Mr. and Mrs. Alexander."

"Quite right, quite right," said Sir Gilbert. "My son, for family reasons, chose, right up to the time of his death, to keep his surname in abeyance. Well, and what happened after your arrival in the States?"

"We settled in a place called Barrytown in one of the Eastern States, where John (I always called my husband John, Sir Gilbert) thought he saw an opening for the profitable investment of his capital. But he had had no training, and in all business relations was little better than a child compared with the shrewd Yankees in whose midst he had chosen to locate himself. The result was what might have been expected. Instead of making money, at the end of two years he

found himself about four thousand pounds poorer than when he had started in business."

"That was burning his fingers with a vengeance," interpolated the Captain, who had so far maintained a diplomatic silence.

Sir Gilbert glared at him for an instant and then turned his shoulder a couple of inches more towards him. "Proceed, madam, pray proceed," he said blandly to Giovanna.

"By that time our child was born and my health had given way. The doctors told John that the climate of the Eastern States was too inclement for me, and that if I stayed there another winter he would risk losing me. Thereupon he decided to break up our home and go further inland in search at once of a climate that would be likely to agree with me, and of an opening for what was left of his capital which promised better results than his first venture had brought him. Meanwhile I was to go back to Italy, of course taking my child with me, and strive to recruit my health in my native air. As soon as he found himself prospering and had settled where our new home was to be, he would send for me, or fetch me to join him. Well, sir, we parted, my husband seeing me on board ship at New York, little thinking that we should never see each other again. Two letters from him reached me after my arrival at home, in the second of which he told me that he was going to penetrate still further west, or south, I forget which. After that came a silence which has remained unbroken till the present day."

As Giovanna ended, her head sank forward a little and, as if involuntarily, the fingers of her right hand sought and pressed the golden hoop which still graced the third finger of her left hand.

The Captain had been on thorns for the last few minutes for fear lest she should trip, or contradict herself over some point of the narrative which he had so carefully elaborated for her. Now he began to breathe more freely. They were by no means out of the wood yet, but everything had gone so smoothly up till now that it was surely not unreasonable to hope their good fortune would attend them to the end.

"And you never made any effort to trace your husband?" said Sir Gilbert after a pause.

"Sir Gilbert!" exclaimed Giovanna in a tone of genuine amazement. "Please to consider the circumstances of the case. Month after month went by, and every morning on opening my eyes, my first words were, 'Surely I shall have a letter to-day.' But none came. Not till a year had gone by did I give up all hope. Whether my husband was alive or dead, I knew not. What was I to do? America is a big country, and even if I had gone back to New York, I altogether fail to see how it would have been possible for me to trace him after the lapse of so long a time."

"You are quite right, madam. My question was a foolish one. When the year had gone by, what then? Did you never make any attempt to seek out your husband's relatives?"

"Never, Sir Gilbert. It was a matter I did not feel myself at liberty to pry into. Seeing that my husband had never spoken to me about his friends and connections, a certain pride—shall I call it?—withheld me from trying to penetrate a secret which he had not seen fit to share with me."

"At length, however, you saw cause to think differently."

"I was about to explain, Sir Gilbert," said Giovanna with a touch of hauteur which became her well. "Time went on till my son was twelve years old, and then my father died (I had lost my mother many years before), after which event I determined to come to England, where my only brother had been some time settled. I wanted my son to become acquainted with his father's country, and to train him up to become as much like an Englishman as possible. Besides, as time went on it became requisite that he should do something for his living, the whole of my income not amounting to more than a hundred pounds of English money a year. Not to weary you, Gilbert, I will merely add that my son is now, and has been for some time past, earning his living in London as a drawing-master."

"As a drawing-master?" ejaculated Sir Gilbert as if to himself.

"It was quite by accident that my uncle here discovered that my late husband was your eldest son, Sir Gilbert; but after the discovery had been made it became a matter of anxious thought with us whether we should, or should not, proceed any further in the affair. At length we decided that, as a matter of simple justice to you, we were bound to acquaint you with the fact that you had a grandson living of whose existence you had heretofore been unaware, leaving it for you to make whatever use of the knowledge you might deem best."

"*Brava! bravissima!*" ejaculated the Captain under his breath as Giovanna came to an end. "I could not have done it better myself. Not a hitch nor a slip anywhere. What will the old boy do now?"

What the "old boy" did was to take a few silent turns about the room with his hands behind his back, his eyes bent on the carpet, and his head sunk between his shoulders. It was his invariable practice when mentally puzzled or perturbed.

"Madam," he said at length, coming to a halt and planting himself on the hearthrug with his back towards the grate, "nothing could have been more straightforward, or perspicacious than the narrative with which you have just favoured me, and I have no hesitation in saying that to me it seems to bear the stamp of absolute truth. Singularly enough, it happens that I am in a position to enlighten you and set your mind at rest for ever as to the fate of your husband. Poor Alec was killed by the explosion of a steam-boat at a date which, I doubt not, will prove on investigation to have been within a few months of the parting between you and him. No wonder, my dear lady, that you looked in vain for any more letters from him."

"Oh, Sir Gilbert," ejaculated Giovanna, "what an awful fate was his! My poor John! My poor husband!"

She covered her face with her hands and bent her head over the end of the couch on which she was seated. Sir Gilbert turned his back and took up first one ornament off the mantel-piece and then another. The Captain tried to look sympathetic, but failed signally. No long time passed before Giovanna sat up and quietly wiped her eyes. Sir Gilbert had felt sure that she was not the kind of woman to make a scene, or go into hysterics, and he secretly commended her good sense. He now turned and cleared his voice. During the last minute or two he had made up his mind to a certain course.

"My dear madam," he began, "I trust you will do me the favour of bringing your son to the Chase to-morrow forenoon and introducing him to me." He was careful not to say "my grandson."

Giovanna's heart went up with a bound. "I will do so with the greatest pleasure, Sir Gilbert," she replied in her usual composed tones, but her cheeks flushed a little and a sudden light leapt to her eyes.

"There remains one point, however," resumed Sir Gilbert, "about which it may be as well to say a few words, so that, in time to come, no misapprehension in the matter may exist on the part of anyone concerned." Again he cleared his voice. "When my son left England it was by my request. He was deeply involved in debt—not for the first or second time—and he applied to me, as he had done before, to extricate him from his difficulties. This I agreed to do on condition that he would go abroad and stay there till he should have my permission to return. He agreed to the condition and went. At the end of two years he wrote me to the effect that he was desirous of emigrating and pushing his fortunes in the United States, and that if I would pay over to him the sum of six thousand pounds he would sanction the cutting off of the family entail. It was an offer which, after consideration, I decided to accept. I had three other sons then living, and from what I knew of Alec it seemed clear to me that after my death he would simply make ducks and drakes of the property. Accordingly, I went out to Catanzaro, taking my lawyer with me. The six thousand pounds was paid over to my son, and in return he signed certain documents, by the provisions of which he cut himself off from all succession to the family estates. Now, I have only spoken of this fact at so much length because I wish it to be clearly understood that no right of succession to the Clare estates any longer exists, and that it is open to me to will every acre of land and every shilling of which I may die possessed, to whomsoever I may choose to constitute my heirs."

(To be continued.)

THE WALTZ.

By J. F. ROWBOTHAM, AUTHOR OF THE 'DIARY OF MUSIC.'

ACCORDING to Byron, and he has hit the truth pretty nearly, the waltz came into England the same time as the news of the battle of Austerlitz. It was a fresh decoration to the brighter days of the Regency, and shortly after its appearance in London the whole town, or those, at least, who pretended to any degree of fashion, went dancing mad.

But to imagine that the waltz itself dates back to no earlier a period is to make a great mistake. The earliest traces we find of anything approaching to a waltz are two old tunes, of which the date is about the beginning of the eighteenth century. One of them at least is well known in England, as 'Lieber Augustin'—a tune familiar to our grandmothers.

The first of the great masters who condescended to write waltzes was Mozart. He has left us a small collection. If report says true, he was as good a dancer as he was a musician, and knew exactly what waltzers wanted. Accordingly we find in his waltzes harmony of the simplest, melody of the sweetest, and a powerfully marked rhythm.

Beethoven was an execrable dancer, and made symphonies better than he did waltzes; but, for all that, he did not despise the latter, as we may see from the minute pains which he has taken to chronicle his waltzes in the catalogue of his works.

Among Beethoven's contemporaries, however, there was one who excelled the great master in this particular branch of music. This was Reissiger—a man who has been so unfortunate as to lose the glory of his most beautiful composition. 'Weber's Last Waltz,' it is well known, was written not by Weber, but by Reissiger. Singularly enough, people have always refused to acknowledge the true story, and the myth still flourishes in England how Weber wrote his 'Last Waltz' on his death-bed, and how his mourning friends found the precious manuscript under his pillow.

It became the fashion shortly afterwards to have twelve waltzes in the set. The enormous bulk which the waltz attained was said by wags of the day in Vienna to be occasioned by the length of the dinner. At any rate, twelve courses were the legitimate number at a Viennese dinner, and twelve waltzes the orthodox number in a set.

Learned pedants took advantage of the opportunity to air their musical knowledge in so elaborate a species of composition. Schneider forsook his oratorios and made waltzes. Schiedermeyer, who till now had composed exclusively for the church, made his *début* in the ball-room with a set of twelve waltzes and trios. Dummel wrote a set of

twelve waltzes for the opening of the Apollo Saal in Vienna, which for pomp, majesty, and length rival the most sublime of symphonies.

The man who delivered the waltz from the era of bad taste, and restored it to a more convenient simplicity, was a composer whose name can never be handed down to posterity, because it is totally unpronounceable. His name was Krch. Krch reduced the number of twelve waltzes to reasonable dimensions, expressed their melodies in bright and lively airs, and, generally speaking, made the dance a convenient and manageable form.

The most celebrated contemporary of Krch's was Schubert.

A child of the people, a genuine Viennese, Schubert spoke the light language of the waltz as naturally as he sang his lieder. Fully recognising the duty of the dance writer, he is always light, always simple, and shows that he can make the waltz interesting without making it heavy. His waltzes are delightful idylls.

But yet the waltzes of Schubert have never attained any enduring reputation. Why? Because in his time the waltz itself, the actual dance, was as yet imperfectly developed. When Schubert wrote, the waltz was a slow dance, almost like the Bohemian Ländler—a slow, dreamy, rocking sort of dance, so slow in fact that nowadays we take two turns to its one.

It was reserved for the elder Strauss to metamorphose this old rocking waltz into a species of waltz-galop that sends the blood tingling through the veins and sets the whole frame on fire. In the year 1830 Strauss's first waltz was published in Vienna. About this time locomotion began to increase its speed all the world over, and contemporaneously with the invention of the steam-engine we have the invention of the quick waltz.

With Johann Strauss the elder began the golden age of the waltz. Schottisches, polonaises, polkas, Ländlers—all disappeared before the conquering banner of the waltz under Strauss's guidance; his popularity, his empire over the ball-rooms and drawing-rooms of Vienna became unbounded. The whole town worshipped him and his waltzes. Perhaps musician had never been and never will be so popular again.

After a while however a mighty rival appeared on the scene in the person of Lanner, and poor Vienna was thrown into a state of agitation that was pitiable.

The Straussists and the Lannerists threatened to throw the whole fabric of society into confusion. Ball-room was divided against ball-room, partner against partner, father against son. The Gluck and Piccini drama was enacted over again, but this time the issue was not such a tragic one.

If we remember rightly, the celebrated Parisian conflict ended in the ostracism of one of the rival chiefs—Piccini. This was to be expected from the hot-headed Parisians. But the festive Viennese were wiser in their generation. It is a saying, give a Vienna man the choice between a roast pheasant and a roast fowl, and he'll take both.

Thus in fact did Vienna deal with Strauss and Lanner. The feud was patched up, and the two waltz kings were enrolled as monarchs of equal power.

Of the two writers Strauss is more especially the man of his day. The gay thoughtlessness, the *bonhomie*, the wild freedom of the Viennese ball-rooms at that time, are faithfully reflected in his music. After Strauss, Lanner's waltzes came like a draught of pure country air, and breathe a tender sweetness which Strauss knew not of.

The Lannerists were the sentimental section of the community. Unrequited attachments, blighted hopes, withered lives, found in Lanner the balm which healed them. Strauss had a different following altogether, and his waltzes tell us who this following was. Do they not speak as clearly as waltzes can speak of epaulettes, stars and ribands, diamonds, rouge, and the bright eyes of pretty women.

When Lanner died, Strauss was left sole master of the scene.

The hero of Vienna resolved to become the hero of Europe, and visited most of the capitals with his orchestra, giving concerts which consisted wholly and solely of dance music. To play dance music in the concert-room is a barbarism which should never have been encouraged; but to be forced to sit still while Strauss's waltzes were played, was like the punishment of Tantalus. Offended art could scarcely have wreaked a more terrible vengeance. Perhaps the punishment was greater than the offence.

As a boy whips up a top, so did Strauss whip up the waltz. From the day when he stepped out into public, he never ceased flogging and lashing till he had goaded the lazy dance to its present dizzy pace.

He has likewise the honour of being the inventor of Titles and Title pages.

Up to his time it has been the practice of composers to have their waltzes without any better distinctive mark than a mere number. But Strauss loved his children too well to let them go into the world unbaptised, so he took to christening one and all of them.

That he consulted the convenience of the public by so doing there is no doubt. The confusion in the world of music was appalling. How could the Vienna young ladies carry 'Op. 236' in their heads all the way from their house to the music shop? But if it were the 'Pearl of the Ocean' or the 'First Love,' the task was immensely simplified.

So Strauss regularly christened his children, and the practice has been taken up with a vengeance by succeeding composers, who now-a-days rummage heaven and earth for euphonious titles. It is doubtful if Strauss ever meant more by his names than a shipowner does when he calls his vessel the 'Boadicea' or the 'Lily of Killarney.' Many of his waltzes bear the name of the Salon where they were first played. Some were christened after the person to whom they were dedicated. Others again are more happily named, such as 'An Antidote against Sleep,' 'Life is a Dance.'

Strauss has had a thousand imitators, but no equal. His peculiar power lay in the art with which he diversified the monotonous waltz rhythm without weakening the swing of the time. A pizzicato note at the strong part of the bar, and a trill at the weak part; a tantalising pause, and then a flight of crisp figures tumbling down from the highest peak of the soprano to the profound depths of the bass, which all the while plods on without a break, giving as firm a rhythm as the anvils in the 'Trovatore'; then a stream of enchanting melody, succeeded by a most delightful piece of banter; everything is calculated to give variety. Strauss's waltzes are musical kaleidoscopes: at each turn there is a novelty.

With Strauss died the electrifying power of his waltzes. The slight pale little man was the spirit of his orchestra. You might know this by the way he conducted. He was like one possessed—sometimes waving his bow frantically in the air, at other times bringing it down on his fiddle, and soaring above all the band; now eagerly listening, now passionately leading. He was convulsed with the spirit of his music. His grimaces were not affectation—he couldn't help them.

When Strauss the elder died, Strauss the younger stepped into his place, and he proved himself no unworthy successor to his sire.

Lumbye and Gungl have been pleasing writers, but of a different style to Strauss. Gungl especially has gone far to revive the spirit of Lanner. His 'Dreams on the Ocean' have all Lanner's sentiment, and breathe the charm of Mendelssohn's romantic overtures.

The pet of the ball-room, the waltz, has always shown the best possible breeding in the chamber and the concert-room. Under the hands of Chopin it has attained the delicacy and grace of a nocturne. Some of Chopin's waltzes are such as elves might dance to. As you play them you fancy at times that you see Puck playing hide and seek round the quavers' tails. Others again have a statelier ring and sound like reminiscences of a Court ball. Rightly did Weber in his 'Invitation to the Dance,' adopt the waltz form as the type of all that is elegant and attractive in dance music. Berlioz, in his ball-room scene in 'Romeo and Juliet,' has made a similar choice. He wanted a form of dance that would conjure up to the hearer the gorgeous pomp of the Capulets, the brilliant crowd of earth-treading stars that make dark heaven light, the passion of Romeo, the timid love of Juliet, and so he chose the waltz.

Bewitching waltz, empress of the ball-room, live on! and evil be the hand that casts the first stone at thee!



MR. CARTER'S CLIENT

BY E. FAIRFAX BYRNE.

I.

IN a quiet household, one cold bright morning towards the end of September, 1872, a young lady entered the solidly comfortable dining-room of a villa in a Manchester suburb. She was about twenty-eight years of age, but her stout developed figure made her look older; her face was handsome, but of a type eminently prosaic and uninteresting.

It was just ten minutes to eight o'clock, and breakfast was laid. A warm ray of sunlight came round the corner of the window and fell in a bright band on the carpet. Miss Matilda Burgess instantly lowered the blind. Then she walked up to the fireplace, in which nothing cosier than an elegant fall of white muslin ravellings was to be seen, and looked at the clock. When she moved there was a creak to her shoe, and a jangling sound of bracelets and trinkets accompanied her.

The door opened again. This time a lady of about fifty years of age entered; she had a plain but not uninteresting face—one of the pale, self-devoted type, and not without a hint of character in the brows and lips. This was Miss Burgess's "lady companion" and chaperon—a distant relative of her father; and she was called "Cousin Mary."

Hardly had she closed the door behind her, when a hasty patter down the stairs, was followed by the entry of a slim girl of twenty-four; she had a pretty enough face, but it was marred by an expression as discontented as Matilda Burgess's was flatly satisfied. This was her orphan cousin, and ward of her father's—Henrietta Burgess.

"Good-morning, Matilda. Good-morning, Henrietta," said Cousin Mary, kissing the one and extending her hand to the other: "I hope I see you both well. Father not down yet?"

"No fire!" said Henrietta crossly, and drawing her shoulders together with a shiver.

"Father is not down yet, Cousin Mary," said Matilda. "A fire Henrietta! It is not October yet!"

She spoke with an air of surprise, as though fires and dates were necessarily inter-dependent.

"It is warm and sunshiny, my love!" said Cousin Mary soothingly.

"Possibly!—Behind that blind," returned Henrietta grimly.

"The sun fell on the carpet; you know that fades it," said Matilda.

Henrietta made an expressive gesture, and walking to the venetian, pushed herself behind with a great rattle, so as to receive the warm ray it excluded. Cousin Mary, with a tone more depression on her pale face than before, opened the morning paper. It was the *Manchester Watchman*, and was the safe and invariable accompaniment of the Manchester middle-class morning meal. As she raised it, she scattered from beneath a little heap of letters.

"I declare I never remarked that the post had come in," exclaimed Matilda, gathering them up. Henrietta peeped from her concealment behind the blind with a shade more life in her face. "All for father!" said Matilda with monotonous cheeriness. The venetian banged down again, and Henrietta's face disappeared.

Meanwhile, Cousin Mary, not a lash of whose eyes had been changed by the remotest hint of expectation, had opened the sheet.

"Dear me! They really are going to institute a woman's college at Cambridge! In the heart of the University, my dear Matilda!"

"How shockingly forward and bold!" said Matilda, gravely.

A sigh escaped from behind the venetian, and Cousin Mary frowned thoughtfully. At that moment the foot of Mr. Burgess was heard outside. Cousin Mary at once seated herself upon the sofa; and Matilda rang the bell. Henrietta issued disconsolately from behind the blind.

Three minutes late!" said Matilda to herself, looking at the clock. She spoke not in reproof, but in amazement.

The door opened, and in trotted a little pleasant elderly man. He saluted the young ladies on the cheek, and shook the elder lady by the hand. Then he seated himself before the family Bible, a row of servants came in, and "family prayers" began.

Prayers being over, and the servants dismissed, the family gathered to the table. Matilda took the tea-tray, her father the head of the table, and the others each had a side to themselves. From their isolated positions they talked unutterable commonplaces softly to each other, while Mr. Burgess opened his letters. Presently he looked up, beaming.

"Dear me!" he said. "Dear me! Girls!" Matilda and Cousin Mary smiled. The lashes of Henrietta quivered, and a flash of expectation came into her face. "I shall positively have to ask your advice!—to confide in you! A most extraordinary thing has occurred!" Mr. Burgess was handling a common blue business letter as he spoke. Over his spectacles his eyes twinkled rather roguishly.

"Is it that letter, father?" asked Matilda. "You have not sent up your cup for a second supply of coffee."

Mr. Burgess passed the cup automatically, while Henrietta glanced impatiently at her cousin from under her eyelids.

"It is a matter so extraordinary, that I must really take counsel

upon it ; and you, ladies, are the best to give it," said Mr. Burgess, tapping the blue letter with his gold-rimmed spectacles, which he took off his nose for the purpose.

"Yes, father dear. But won't you help Cousin Mary to some more bacon?" said Matilda, anxiously.

Henrietta's eyes moved towards her with a quite desperate look.

"You may remember," said Mr. Burgess, disregarding the interruption in his excitement, "a firm of solicitors, most respectable and wealthy, with whom I have had some acquaintance in a friendly way? I allude to Messrs. Carter and Hoskinson, of London."

"I think I recall the name," said Matilda, trying hard to do so, and frowning at the cooling toast.

"A very wealthy firm, and one of eminent respectability. Mr. Carter, the senior partner, is, I may say, a man above the average. He has met the reward of merit. He was elected for Mid-Middlesex in the Conservative interest, and now sits in the House. He tells me that, owing to the late Session and some additional private business, he has only just been able to secure his holiday, and is about to set out for the South of France, and will prolong his tour to Egypt. His health, it appears, requires a long change."

It was evident to his auditors that Mr. Carter was a great personage, so much manner did Mr. Burgess throw into the recital of these confidences.

"Who is Mr. Hoskinson?" asked Cousin Mary, not at all seeing the drift.

"I know nothing of Hoskinson—nothing at all," said Mr. Burgess, waving his hand grandly; "Carter is my friend—Mr. Carter the M.P. The handwriting of this letter *may* be Hoskinson's, however; indeed, it probably is. It is too intimate a document to have been dictated to a clerk. But it is only signed in Carter's own hand. You see, he is hurried, and on the eve of his departure from England."

"Perhaps you will tell us the contents, Cousin Frederic," said Cousin Mary.

"I am about to do so," said Mr. Burgess, settling his spectacles on his nose and applying himself at length to the blue letter, very much to the relief of Henrietta's impatience. The beginning merely gave the particulars of the proposed journey; then came the kernel of the interest in the shape of the following:—

"Previous to my departure, the Firm has resolved to put into your hands, should your house feel inclined to accept the responsibility, the following interesting case:—Our client Gilbert Staunton, of Ashton Manor, in the county of Middlesex, Esq., died unexpectedly at his residence some days ago——"

"Father!" interrupted Matilda, "I saw that death in the *Times* Obituary last night."

"Did you, my dear, did you?" said Mr. Burgess with interest. "But allow me to proceed."

"Mr. Staunton was a young man in the pride of life, and was about to contract a marriage with a lady in the same county. As he was apparently in good health, he destroyed his old will and directed us to prepare a new one ready for signature on the day of his marriage. He had given us only the barest preliminary instructions when death put an end to every hope. Consequently he died intestate, and the next-of-kin is the possessor not only of the estates, but the whole of his great personal wealth. The man so enriched by fortune is a far-off cousin named Archibald Staunton, now living, we believe, in a wretched state of poverty in a back street of Manchester. At present we have not been able either to discover or to communicate with him. The fear of fraud prevents our advertising, and the enclosed address is the only clue we have to his whereabouts. If you will accept the case, we desire that you should undertake for us the discovery of the youth, that you should inform him of his good fortune, and during my absence from England make such arrangements as are necessary for him, sparing no expense whatever. You will perceive from my confidence that I am anxious this affair should be in the hands of an experienced solicitor living in the locality. Your immediate reply in the affirmative will greatly relieve my mind before my departure.

"By the way, can you assure us of the perfect respectability and good faith of a firm of solicitors in your neighbourhood named Green & Dawson? We find them duly enrolled, but have a special reason for the enquiry. Kindly treat this letter as confidential, and permit us to remain,

"Faithfully yours,

"CARTER & HOSKINSON,

"Solicitors."

"How romantic and how pathetic!" exclaimed Cousin Mary, her thoughts divided between the disappointed bride and the fortunate heir.

"Why are you telling it to us, uncle?" asked Henrietta, speaking for the first time.

"Because, my dears, if I am to look after this interesting young man, I shall certainly, to begin with, need to bring him here."

"The best bed-room will have to be prepared," said Matilda thoughtfully.

"At present, my love, we have not even found him. If we are successful we shall certainly have need of it."

"He is young!" said Henrietta, over whose face that enlivening look of expectation had come. "But I know" she added after a pause "that he will be hideous—and dull."

"My dear, I have formed quite different expectations," said Cousin Mary.

Meanwhile Mr. Burgess hurried away to his office in unusual haste and consulted his head clerk. It was really a very high compliment that had been paid him, for Mr. Carter was a leading man in the world of law. In matters of this kind, a display of flattered feeling was, however, the last policy he was likely to adopt. His head clerk therefore, indited the following dry note, to which Mr. Burgess duly appended his signature.

"DEAR SIR,—I am in receipt of yours of the 24th, and am happy to undertake your commission. Messrs. Green & Dawson have a very high reputation indeed. I speak from personal knowledge.

"Yours very faithfully,

"FRED. BURGESS."

A couple of posts after the dispatch of this letter, a hearty epistle, though a hurried one, reached the office in Manchester. It was from beginning throughout in Mr. Carter's own handwriting.

"DEAR MR. BURGESS,—Your prompt reply relieves me from a burden of anxiety. Many cordial thanks.

"Yours faithfully,

"HY. CARTER."

Meanwhile a delicious suspense and excitement pervaded the house such as Henrietta never remembered before. The best bedroom was always ready and the larder had always something extra in it. Matilda went about all day in her second-best gown, and the very best one had clean lace sewn in, so as to be ready at a pinch at any moment. Henrietta, whose resources were narrow, coaxed something pretty out of Cousin Mary, and furbished up her old gowns into picturesque effects.

From the day when the best bed was first laid out for airing purposes before a roasting fire, she had shyly followed her cousin every morning into the guest-chamber, and watched the preparations with eager anticipation. She was a silent creature and asked few questions; but each day she peeped into the room and saw that the sheets remained spread on the bed, and that the hot-pans were inside to keep in warming.

Nothing had ever happened before that she remembered; and now it really appeared as though something were going to take place. The poor starved life abandoned itself to the thought with utter and complete delight.

One evening the event fell. Henrietta had begun to feel that the freshness of the picturesque gown was wearing off, but she had it on, and Matilda was gorgeous in her best. The three ladies were

assembled in the drawing-room. Everything in that room was ugly and costly ; nothing could redeem it into a pretty picture. It was a place with ladies in—that was all. Still Henrietta, in her youth and eagerness was there, and any entering eye would stray to her by nature, and immediately as to the one thing exceptional. She sat on the hearth in the lowest of the prim chairs ; her pale cheek contrasted rather remarkably with her dark gloomy eyes—in which a spark from the fire glittered—and her dark ruffled hair. “Untidy hair,” Matilda called it, whose locks were screwed into tight and regular plaits.

The ladies were quite silent because there never was anything to talk about. Suddenly wheels were heard in the road ; they stopped, and there was a brisk ring.

Henrietta dropped her book on her knee and stared at the door ; Matilda settled her collar and arranged her skirt, and put on an indescribable manner—just as though she were sitting for her photograph, Henrietta thought : and Cousin Mary laid down her knitting. Then the door at which Henrietta was staring opened, and Mr. Burgess stood on the threshold with a tall figure behind him, who, to Henrietta’s deep throbbing excitement, looked like a shadow from her dreams.

“Mr. Archibald Staunton,” announced Mr. Burgess—“my daughter, my niece, my cousin, Miss Mary Simpson.”

Henrietta, when her bow was done—and they all bowed simultaneously—sank back in the chair with a soft sigh of amazement. The eyes of the man in the doorway had darted towards her at once, and the eyebrows had gone up in a slight start of interest and surprise.

The girl’s ideas of life were founded upon the few novels she had read, and nothing could more resemble the beginning of a romance than this.

Meanwhile Mr. Archibald Staunton had advanced into the room, awkwardly enough if the truth were known. He was exceedingly poorly dressed. Indeed, in the matter of clothing, his plight was nothing short of deplorable. He seemed to stray into the room like a wild creature, making three little bows as he came along, and stumbling with a dazed air into the chair which Cousin Mary pushed towards him. Then his eyes turned towards Henrietta again. The girl’s heart beat too wildly for her to be able to move.

“I am sure you are tired with—with—your journey,” began Matilda vaguely.

“We are glad to welcome you here,” said Cousin Mary with more tact.

The young man, who was certainly good-looking, murmured something indistinctly, and bowed in Miss Simpson’s direction.

“Dear, dear ! Mary !” exclaimed Mr. Burgess suddenly trotting forwards, “I’m afraid, I’m very much afraid, this is a case of starvation. Our young friend is fainting.”

II.

THE guest was judiciously fed and conveyed to his bedroom, and permitted to betake himself between the sheets. This was accomplished with some difficulty, Matilda having a fixed idea that a guest ought to be "amused"—that is, shown the family album, the book of Italian landscapes, and made to listen to her own rendering of "*Pluie de Perles*" on the piano, and Henrietta's soft piping of "I cannot sing the old songs."

Matilda always had a "programme" of events which she thought "proper," and she was much puzzled and disturbed when it was interrupted.

The guest, however, being at last locked in his chamber, Mr. Burgess related the story of his discovery. First they had judiciously advertised, but not so as to attract adventurers; then they had employed a detective. Finally he had himself undertaken that rôle in an amateurish fashion, assisted by the head clerk, and, contrary to his humble expectations, he had been entirely successful; while that giant of skill, Mr. T. of the detective force, had failed to obtain the least trace of the lost heir. The discovery was dramatic. They ran Mr. Staunton to earth at last in a wretched lodging-house in a back slum. Without sending up any announcement, they penetrated into an upper storey and—"so shy, my dear ladies, was our young hero"—they were almost driven to obtaining an entry by force into the garret wherein Mr. Archibald Staunton concealed his poverty and misfortunes. Mr. Burgess described the feeble condition in which they found him, reposing on a wretched bed with a cup of water and a dry crust standing untasted on the table. Upon their intrusion, Mr. Staunton had started up with an air of defiance, gazing at them silently, not in fear, but in indignant reproach.

"I had," said Mr. Burgess to his entranced auditors, "much ado to break my news gently enough to our friend. In truth, I have at present not informed him of the extent of his good fortune."

"What did you say, uncle?" asked Henrietta breathlessly.

"I told him my name and said that I was the bearer of some good news; and that if he could make it convenient to accompany us, I believed I could make it worth his while to do so."

"And what did he say?"

"He looked at me with sorrowful reproach and exclaimed: 'Do you offer a Staunton charity?' I assured him this was not the case, but that I knew of something to his advantage, and that I saw my way to setting him on his legs again without his being beholden to anyone."

"And what happened next?"

"Then, my dear, after a little further pressure, we induced him to step into a cab and accompany us here."

"Has he brought his trunks?" asked Matilda.

"My love, he has no trunks; nor—ahem—any other clothes than those he stands up in."

Matilda leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes for a second. Henrietta, on the contrary, opened her dark gloomy orbs wider and stared at the fire.

"I trust, Cousin Frederic," said Cousin Mary, "that you have made some arrangement with regard to the young man's habiliments. He appeared to me—though I confess a feminine eye cannot quite gauge these matters—to be scarcely attired up to his—to *our* position."

"I have made such arrangements, Cousin Mary."

Mr. Burgess closed his lips as though to repress further speech; but he thought better of it, and continued in a burst of confidence:

"My head clerk has been commissioned to send my tailor—my own tailor—round early to-morrow morning to take his measurement. Meanwhile he will be accommodated with a ready-made suit. I have told the tradespeople to spare no expense, but to be prepared to provide such an outfit as will be suitable to a young man of position and of great wealth."

Henrietta slept little that night. Even her uncle's prose, and the ready-made suit, and Cousin Mary's solicitude, had been unable to divest her uncle's story of its element of romance and mystery. As to the appearance of Mr. Staunton, that was indelibly impressed on her mind even though he had only been in her presence some fifteen minutes. He was above the middle height and slender in build; his hair was dark and curly; he wore a thick moustache and though his face was disfigured by a beard of two or three days' growth, she found his appearance handsome and striking. Circumstances lent it a reflected glory. That reproachful "Do you offer a Staunton charity?" had marked him in her estimation as a hero. Pity assisted the work. He had suffered. There were, indeed, traces of very severe deprivation in his countenance, and no graceful entry into a room could have appealed to her as did those wild eyes and that feeble stumble.

Still commonplace life—and in this house of uncompromising prose even romance lost half its lustre—went on as usual, and claimed the hero for itself. Next day, she peeped from the door of her bedroom to see all that went on. *He* had not come down to breakfast, but a most dainty little meal had been sent up to him on a tray, which Matilda prepared with her own hands. And early in the morning, a couple of men arrived in a cab, and were shown upstairs the back way. Henrietta watched them on their passage to the best bedroom. The first man was a most respectably clad shopman, carrying a bag; the second was, presumably, his subordinate; he carried a larger bag, and Henrietta detected a long piece of measuring-tape hanging out of his pocket, and the head of a large pair of scissors, and a little bundle of material with chalk marks on it, and a little forest of pins on the lapel of his shabby coat. But even the unconquerable prose of this

procession as it passed along the landing, and vanished in the best bedroom, could not dispel the romantic dream which was beginning to burn in the little inexperienced heart.

It was lunch-time before he appeared. He came into the drawing-room where Matilda was awaiting him with a company air calculated to confound even the most accomplished frequenter of society. He was shaven, well-dressed, composed in bearing, but very white and worn and weak. He bowed courteously, and then advanced shivering to the fire. Cousin Mary took the poker and stirred it into a wild blaze. He thanked her with a silent bow. Matilda seized the family album, placed it on a small table by his side, and opened it at the portrait of the deceased Uncle John Simpson, the stockbroker. He marked his appreciation by a second silent bow, and turned away to the fire. Matilda glanced unsteadily towards the Italian sketches, and then at the piano, where the "*Pluie de Perles*" was ready on the stand; but Cousin Mary seized the opportunity afforded by the guest's abstraction to pluck her by the skirt, and get her to sit down. Hints and frowns could not, however, bring Matilda any further than to cause her to relinquish one item of her programme in favour of another.

"Will you sing, Henrietta?" said she, with a company air.

"Certainly not," replied Henrietta, with very natural sharpness.

The guest by the fire raised his head, and held her eyes for several perceptible seconds.

"Thank you," murmured he.

Cousin Mary looked down at her knitting with a little smile, and the slightest touch of colour in her cheek. The contagion of romance had reached her from the agitated heart of the young girl; she had perceived the prolonged gaze, and believed she detected the dawning of a love affair.

Two things combined to render intercourse with the guest extremely difficult; first, his absence of mind and cold reticence; second, Matilda's terrifying deportment. At lunch Mr. Burgess was necessarily absent, and the guest remained unconquerably, proudly silent. Matilda suddenly inquired after the beauties of the Staunton estate. He glanced at her with a red startled look, which caused Cousin Mary to press her foot under the table.

"My cousin thinks—*knows* of your connection with the late Mr Gilbert Staunton, of Ashton Manor," said Henrietta, with pretty apologetic eagerness.

"Just so," said he, absently, but with an interested glance in her direction. Then he appeared struck by something, laid down his knife and fork, and gazed at her inquiringly. The others he ignored. "The *late* Mr. Gilbert Staunton!" he exclaimed. "What does *that* mean?"

Henrietta flushed an agonising red, and, like reflected sunlight, the same colour appeared on the faded cheek of Cousin Mary, and the firm fat contour of Matilda's. All three recalled the fact that

Mr. Burgess had not yet imparted the story of his good fortune to the heir.

"My cousin *thought* she saw the death of Mr. Staunton in the *Times* obituary a few days ago," faltered Henrietta.

"A mistake," returned Archibald Staunton drily; "what she saw was probably the advertisement of his marriage. I have known," he added with unexpected expansiveness, "the advertisements to get wonderfully mixed up, and a birth to appear amongst the deaths."

After this Cousin Mary determinedly took the lead in the conversation; she addressed herself to Henrietta and inquired after her little interests—the Sunday School, the Bazaar, the shopping at the Stores, and Mr. Charles Hamer's grand concerts.

"I myself am musical," said the heir suddenly, and directing that full searching glance upon Henrietta's face.

"Are you? I am so glad!" said she shyly.

"Why?"

"Oh, because I too am musical!" she tripped out, blushing.

He held her eyes for full two seconds.

"We have season tickets for Mr. Hamer's concerts," explained Cousin Mary, delighted to have found a safe topic.

"Indeed! and do you attend regularly?"

"Henrietta does," said Cousin Mary; "we have seats in the second row to the left—a couple of seats. Miss Burgess and I are not very regular in attendance, being not great enthusiasts."

"It is too close to the orchestra," said the young man frowning.

"But," said Matilda, "you can see all your friends come in. Are you a regular attendant, Mr. Staunton?"

"Madam," returned Mr. Staunton, with that red severity of aspect he had shown before, "my circumstances do not permit it."

And he sank gloomily to his plate again.

Conversation was once more crushed, and existence began to assume to Cousin Mary the aspect of a series of knots. What was to be done after lunch? Henrietta solved the problem.

"I am going into the garden," said she, taking a garden hat from the stand in the hall as they passed through it, and darting a glance of defiance at Matilda as she spoke.

"Allow me to accompany you," said the young man quickly.

They went out together. Henrietta showed him the shrubs and the flowers, and the little greenhouse. Not even the fact of Matilda's proximity—she was awaiting their return in the drawing-room—could prevent the inevitable naturalness of the interview when the pair found themselves amongst the colours and scents of the greenhouse.

"Do you know," said Mr. Staunton, as they stood together staring into the cup of an autumn lily—"do you know, ever since I set eyes on you in that first moment when I entered the drawing-room——"

"Yes?"

"I have been haunted by the feeling that—we have met before."

"Oh, how strange!" returned Henrietta, while the lily swooned before her.

"Why! How?"

"Because—I have—felt the same."

He looked at her penetratingly.

"Where have we met before?" said he.

"I—don't know."

She stretched her hand out nervously to the lily. He did the same; and their fingers touched.

"Was it—do you think—in a dream?"

She reflected. That is to say, the smell of the lily, the dazzling cup, the touching fingers, the flowers, the voice, the strangeness and romance, carried her starved existence away on a stream of delicious sensation.

"I believe it was," she faltered presently.

"I know it," he returned with masculine decision; "but—do you believe in such things?"

"I'm afraid I ought not; but that I shall have to!"

Matilda began the "*Pluie de Perles*" from the drawing-room. They started apart.

That evening Mr. Burgess called the heir into his private study and told him the truth. He came back from the interview with a subdued excitement in his face and fire in his eyes; and he made straight across the room to where Henrietta sat.

"I have just heard my news," said he simply, sinking down on a lounge beside her.

Henrietta looked at him quickly with soft subdued eyes.

"I'm almost sorry you have left off believing yourself poor and forlorn," she murmured hurriedly.

He pondered the words with an air of pleased surprise.

"It makes a great change to me," said he thoughtfully. "But my poor cousin! In such a moment one's mind dwells on him. A promising life cut short! A bride disappointed!"

Henrietta turned quickly away, her eyes filling with tears. She repeated the sentiment that had escaped his lips to Matilda and Cousin Mary upstairs.

"My dear," said Cousin Mary, taking her tenderly in her arms, "the young man is as good as he is handsome."

III.

IN spite of Mr. Staunton's admirable sentiment and the elegant black with which Mr. Burgess's tailors provided him, he showed no disposition to make the period of mourning a severe one. Indeed, he could hardly be expected to take the conventional view of a death

which affected him in no way, save to enhance his happiness. And thus a series of dissipation and delight was initiated which changed the dull days of Henrietta to a rainbow hue.

Mr. Burgess, of course, reported the success of his undertaking to the London firm. He received a letter from Mr. Carter's confidential clerk to say that, in the absence of Mr. Carter and the unfortunate illness of Mr. Hoskinson, the settlement of the Ashton Manor estate was a little in abeyance, but that Mr. Carter would probably return earlier than was intended, and that if Mr. Burgess would undertake the immediate affairs of Mr. Archibald Staunton it would be a convenience to the London partners. Mr. Burgess, who saw that a good thing was likely to fall into his hands, undertook the matter with alacrity. And, indeed, very little expense was involved in it. He had but to explain the young man's worldly position to secure from the tradesmen credit to any amount.

Mr. Staunton's taste in amusements revolutionised Mr. Burgess's household for the time. He preferred balls and theatres to bazaars and concerts; indeed, in spite of his musical talent, he did not attend the latter. A delightful time ensued. Mr. Staunton hired a set of handsome chambers near Mr. Burgess's house, and had them luxuriously furnished; indeed, he soon showed that a graduation in poverty by no means disables one from the profession of wealth. His taste proved fastidious, admirable, and expensive.

Mr. Burgess he made his confidential friend, talking to him of his intentions with great openness. He proposed remaining in Manchester until Mr. Carter's return from Egypt, when he would at once proceed to London to meet his lawyers, and afterwards travel abroad to gratify his repressed tastes by seeing the world. Finally he hinted at marriage and a domestic settlement on the estate at Muddleshire. Seeing that his attentions to Henrietta continued, Mr. Burgess was well pleased to hear it.

For the next few weeks time flew on golden wings to Henrietta. From being the dependent of her uncle she was promoted to quite a different set of feelings and experiences. He had always been kindly and indulgent, but now he was lavish; she had all the pretty dresses she could possibly desire, and every wish was gratified almost before it was expressed. Meanwhile two months sped away, and yet the courtship did not advance beyond the point with which it had, in reality, begun. Mr. Staunton never got beyond "tender nothings"; and there even were moments when he was more attentive to Matilda than Cousin Mary altogether liked. But these were but motes in the broad beam of sunlight. The romance of her position engrossed Henrietta, and she knew and saw nothing save her unlooked-for happiness.

There appeared, however, every prospect of the affair coming to its legitimate conclusion shortly. Mr. Staunton had been peculiarly attentive for several days, and experts in these tender matters were

looking forward to a coming ball as the occasion when the lover would probably put an end to his delicious uncertainty.

The evening arrived. Henrietta looked lovely in a new and admirably planned ball-dress, which set off the rather original character of her beauty to perfection. A good many claimed the pleasure of dancing with her. But Mr. Staunton had taken the precaution of securing four waltzes and two square dances beforehand—the latter with the avowed intention of sitting them out. He danced very little indeed with anyone else, but seemed to prefer watching the brilliant happiness of Henrietta, who displayed a hundred charms which had hitherto remained unsuspected. The waltzes and one square dance had been executed and the last square dance was approaching. Something in Henrietta's heart and in the bearing of her lover, told her that this would bring the decision of her fate. She was seated in a small ante-room with her last partner, to whom she was according, if truth were known, a rather distracted attention.

Suddenly Matilda appeared in the doorway, and looked at her with the rather meditative air which of late had characterised her.

The fiddles were already tuning-up for the dance, and Henrietta's sensitive cheek flushed with uneasy feeling under Matilda's inspection. She withdrew; and a moment afterwards Mr. Staunton's form filled the doorway. He advanced towards her.

"This is *our* dance," said he with a slight stress on the word.

A glance, a smile, and a bow from Henrietta granted it, and her late partner left them alone.

"We are going to sit it out, you know," said Mr. Staunton eagerly; "but not here. Here we should be interrupted."

He led the way to a small conservatory and showed her a seat behind some ferns where they could be concealed from the observation of others; and, indeed, all the guests were crowding into the ball-room. The sound of the music accompanied their voices agreeably. She seated herself, and he took a place by her side.

"I have had a delightful time in Manchester," he began.

"I am glad it has been pleasant to you," said she.

"No time in my life has been brighter," said he; "before that eventful morning when Mr. Burgess called on me, I—had not met *you*."

No answer to this could be expected or required. She looked down and played with her fan.

"It has been an inestimable privilege, and now——"

"Yes?"

"*Now*—I am going away."

A light shadow of surprise passed over Henrietta's face. But after all she had known it.

"I shall have to exchange happiness that I know of for pleasures that at best are doubtful."

"You are going abroad?"

"Yes. I have always spoken of my intention of doing so to Mr. Burgess. I received a letter to-night that showed me I must run up to London to-morrow. I have to leave early. May I beg you to keep the fact to yourself for a day or two?"

"Anything you tell me I shall regard as sacred."

"Thank you. Before I go, I should like to make sure——" He paused, seemingly in emotion. Henrietta's heart began to beat suffocatingly. She saw nothing but her fan and her small hand holding it, and all her consciousness was merged in the arm which his coat brushed. It was at this moment that Matilda again appeared at the door of the conservatory, and peered towards the place where they were seated, with that curious, perplexed, meditative air which she was apt to assume if the programme went wrong; then she retired. Henrietta, she could not conceive why, felt a chill pass over her.

"Your sister is ubiquitous, I think," said Mr. Staunton angrily.

"My sister!" said Henrietta, who at that moment had no desire to claim a closer relationship with Matilda than was necessary; "she is not my sister."

"*Not* your sister!" repeated Mr. Staunton with a particularly blank expression.

"No," said Henrietta, "she is my cousin."

"Oh—h!" There was relief in the tone. "She is not then the daughter of your admirable father Mr. Burgess?"

"Mr. Burgess is not my father. He is my uncle," said Henrietta with a smile. Then with an odd impulse which she could not have explained, but which to the end of her life she thanked Heaven for, she added:—"I am merely a poor dependent on my good uncle's very kind bounty."

The moment she had said it her young heart swelled with a sentiment of affection and gratitude towards the good old man whose house, dull as it was, was her home.

"Is that so? Indeed!" said Mr. Archibald Staunton twirling his moustache thoughtfully.

"That is so," said Henrietta, while her heart went suddenly very cold and quiet.

There was an interval of silence; the square dance was rapidly coming to an end.

"I am engaged to Miss Smith for the next dance," said Mr. Staunton presently.

"And I to Mr. Robinson," retorted Henrietta firmly.

Another pause, during which it seemed to Henrietta that all the glow and spring went out of the flowers and left them poor and limp. She had edged away from the touching coat.

"Miss Henrietta!" said Mr. Staunton rather nervously.

"Yes?" said Henrietta in as chill a voice as she could assume.

"This conversation which we began, and which your cousin interrupted——"

"Yes?"

"Will you allow me to continue it later?"

"If you wish. I believe you go to London to-morrow."

"I might accompany you home—I might call to-morrow—I might put off going."

"As you wish."

His manner was disturbed and nervous. He put out his hand, seized hers and stooped to kiss it. Henrietta never knew why she snatched it away and stood up.

The dance came to an end, and the Burgess party got into a hired carriage and went home. Mr. Staunton did not appear to escort them, nor even to take his leave of them. Matilda stared meditatively at Henrietta all the way home, and Henrietta gazed out of the window. All night she lay awake. Did she doubt him or did she not doubt him? Had it been an illusion, and was it already broken? The question was not very easily decided, for her mind was in confusion.

The next day passed heavily enough; and Matilda nearly drove the girl distracted by the slow, puzzled, meditative stare which she fastened perpetually on her face. No one called at the house at all until the evening; and then, while they were all, including Mr. Burgess, seated in the drawing-room, a ring came at the bell.

Henrietta's white face flushed crimson.

The opening of the door was followed by a heavy solid tread along the hall. The drawing-room door was flung wide, and the servant announced:—"Mr. Archibald Staunton!"

For one moment the girl's heart leapt with relief; the next it sank down to ashes and despair.

A kindly, gentlemanly-looking man of about forty, with a clean-shaved face and grey hair, stood on the threshold and glanced round on the circle with a grave commiserating expression.

"Why! Dear me! Bless my soul!" cried Mr. Burgess, starting up and staring at him.

"I come straight from Messrs. Carter & Hoskinson of London," said the stranger with a serious air; "I am Mr. Archibald Staunton."

For the next two days Henrietta went about her duties with a white set face; she relaxed nothing of her activity, and studied the utmost moderation and gentleness in her manner. Matilda, on the contrary, seemed a prey to some nervous disorder. No one, not even Cousin Mary, could find an opening for questioning Henrietta or even to offer her sympathy. As to what had happened, it took a long time for the household to comprehend the extent of the fraud that had been practised upon them, as also upon the firm of Messrs. Carter & Hoskinson in London.

Mr. Carter had been induced by his head clerk, in the hurry of departure, to append his signature to a long document of which the

only words he could see were those he himself had dictated ; viz., an account of his coming journey, and a request for information respecting the firm of Messrs. Green & Dawson. The reticent reply of Mr. Burgess had unwittingly furthered the clerk in his fraud and secured him immunity from suspicion. Mr. Hoskinson's illness—and he was much of an invalid—had both created and extended the opportunity, and the skill of the brilliant accomplice in Manchester had carried the scheme out with effect. Mr. Carter's anxiety had been caused by certain other indications of fraud and mystery which he had failed to unravel, or to trace to their right source—hence his inquiry respecting Messrs. Green & Dawson. And, finally, it was Mr. Hoskinson's recovery and return to the office which gave the signal to the two adventurers to close their brilliant game.

During the two days following the appearance of Mr. Staunton, he remained in the house : and the business conferences between the two gentlemen were too frequent for the sentimental side of the affair, as it touched Henrietta, to be dwelt on. But after two days a letter arrived for her. Everyone recognised its importance, and it was handed to her across the breakfast-table in silence.

In a silence as complete, she broke the seal, perused it and handed it to her uncle. It ran as follows :—

“DEAR MISS HENRIETTA,—By the time this reaches you, I shall be safe out of England, so do not be anxious upon my account. Pardon me for my necessary defection. Allow me to assure you now of the devotion and admiration with which I regard you—a full expression of which you missed the night of that too delightful ball. But my intentions were honourable. I was about to entreat you to elope with me with a view to immediate marriage, when your cousin's appearance cut me short. Do not blame me, Henrietta ! The situation was too hot for me. Being in extraordinary need of funds, I had previously engaged myself to her, and secured from her the amount necessary for your and my sustenance on that never-to-be-realised wedding-tour. My heart was all *yours*. I hasten to assure you of my deep preference.

“As a hint of the reality of my admiration, and as a slight apology for my conduct, allow me to tell you that I am *glad* your little confession of poverty and dependence saved you from linking your innocent life to that of an incorrigible rascal. I am not all bad, Henrietta. You have touched the little spot of goodness I possess, and this is the sign of it. Do not either be altogether ashamed of your lover. I am a gentleman born. I am your equal ; but unfortunate circumstances had reduced me to the position of a clarionet player in Mr. Charles Hamer's grand orchestra. I feared your recognition. On my part, how could I have missed seeing, week by week, the pretty face in the second row of the audience ?

“A packet of tradesmen's bills will be found in the base of my

mantlepiece. As Mr. Burgess recommended me to their services, how can I be responsible for them? Adieu! 'Twas brief, 'twas heavenly, and 'tis past!

"Your devoted admirer,

"ARCHIBALD."

"Matilda," said Mr. Burgess sternly, "what is this allusion to you?"

"Father," said Matilda between her helpless sobs—"indeed he had engaged himself to me: and——"

"Well?" said Mr. Burgess with a severity hitherto unknown to him.

"He induced me to sell out and give him the £500 of Consols that belonged to my mother, and which you placed in my hands."

Mr. Burgess tapped on the breakfast-table with his gold-rimmed glasses a few moments in silence. At the bottom of the good indulgent heart was a stern sense of justice.

"Matilda," said he, gently, but firmly, "the man was your cousin's lover. It was acknowledged and talked of in the house. You must take the consequences of your own act."

No one spoke to or looked at Henrietta. She sat with white face and lowered lashes. She made no sign whatever. But her uncle's words seemed to throw over her an indefinite feeling of protection, and to soothe her outraged heart. Later on in the day she herself came to him.

"My dear, my dear!" said he, taking off his glasses to rub his eyes.

"Uncle," said she, very gently, "have I *any* money of my own?"

"A little, my dear; a few hundreds."

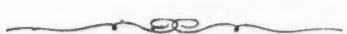
"Then give it to me, and let me pay for my own education at that college in Cambridge Cousin Mary read of in the paper."

"My dear niece! the protection of a home——"

"Uncle," said the girl, interrupting him very gently, "the protection of a home has not saved me. Let me go where I can learn to judge about things, and to protect myself."

That was all she ever said. But she had her way. And after a steady, though not very brilliant career at college, she won her certificates, and secured a position of governess to the motherless, only child of the owner of Ashton Manor, in Muddleshire.

And that is how it happened that Henrietta Burgess became the happy wife of Archibald Staunton after all.



LETTERS FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THE BRETONS AT HOME," "IN THE LOTUS LAND," ETC., ETC.

EAST LONDON. *April, 1893.*



THE FALLS OF HOWICK.

CARE AMICE,—

My last letter was concluded at sea. The blue waters of the ocean surrounded us, the clear and wonderful skies of South Africa were above us; the creatures of the deep—one can hardly call them monsters, since neither sea serpents nor hippopotami were amongst them—crossed our path, or we crossed theirs; probably they would think the latter, asking themselves, these ocean monarchs, by what right we invaded their dominions. But with them also discretion was the better part of valour; they did not show fight; the dolphins and the whales, with a lash of the tail, would sail away where neither shot nor spear could touch them; no sword-fish thrust his weapon into our sides,

leaving behind him a memento of baffled vengeance; gallantly our mighty vessel went her way unopposed by any contending element. I cannot say she rode upon the waves, for no waves were visible. It is literally the case that we have not seen a wave, scarcely a ripple, since we left the shores of old England. This to some people con-

stitutes the charm of the voyage: and this is why the voyage to the Cape is so much praised; once past Madeira, you can almost always depend upon calm waters. But to everyone in search of health it becomes a case of Smooth Seas *versus* Tropics and relaxing weather, beautiful though that weather and those tropics may be. To me the discomfort of the Tropics far outweighed the calmness of the ocean.

The long low coast of South Africa was ever in view as we sailed westward; full of beauty and repose. This broke the monotony of the journey and gave us a very good idea of the country; at least as far as the coast is concerned. We steamed so near that houses and forests, hills and valleys, were distinctly visible. The fires at night were glorious, acres of land frequently blazing and flaming away; beautiful holocausts without a victim. Sometimes these fires are accidental, but occasionally they are of deliberate intent, to clear the land without the trouble of manual labour. Still the sight with all its beauty was always more or less painful in the uncertainty of its origin; one never knew whether it was not bringing desolation in its splendid ravages.

And so day and night succeeded each other, and early one fine morning we found ourselves at anchor in Algoa Bay. In front of us uprose the town of Port Elizabeth in all its glory. It has no harbour at present, and the jetties are not within reach of such vessels as the *Dunottar Castle*. Everyone has to land in steam tugs, and almost all cargo is discharged by lighters.

Port Elizabeth is very flourishing and industrious, and is said to be the envy and jealousy of East London, which lies further west, at the mouth of the famous Buffalo river. As far as I can see, you cannot draw any comparison between them. They differ from each other as much as the East End differs from the West End of our own metropolis. At a first glance, the town impresses one as favourably as any town in South Africa, Durban perhaps excepted, whose matchless situation it is said will stand the ordeal of any comparison. That we have yet to see and to prove.

Here we were to leave the *Dunottar*, travel overland *viâ* Grahams-town and King Williamstown to East London, and there rejoin our vessel, which would take us on to Durban. It was now Saturday morning early, and we were due at East London on Tuesday morning. This would enable us to rest the whole of Sunday at Grahamstown. It is pleasant in travelling to make the Seventh Day a day of rest, whenever this is possible.

There is something which at once prejudices you in favour of Port Elizabeth. A brightness of atmosphere; an orderliness about the place, which is clean and well built, and seems quiet withal and self-respecting: as if its inhabitants were not utterly given up to the race for wealth. True, we landed in the early morning, before the business and bustle of the day had commenced, whilst many were still slumbering who yet were not sluggards; and so everything

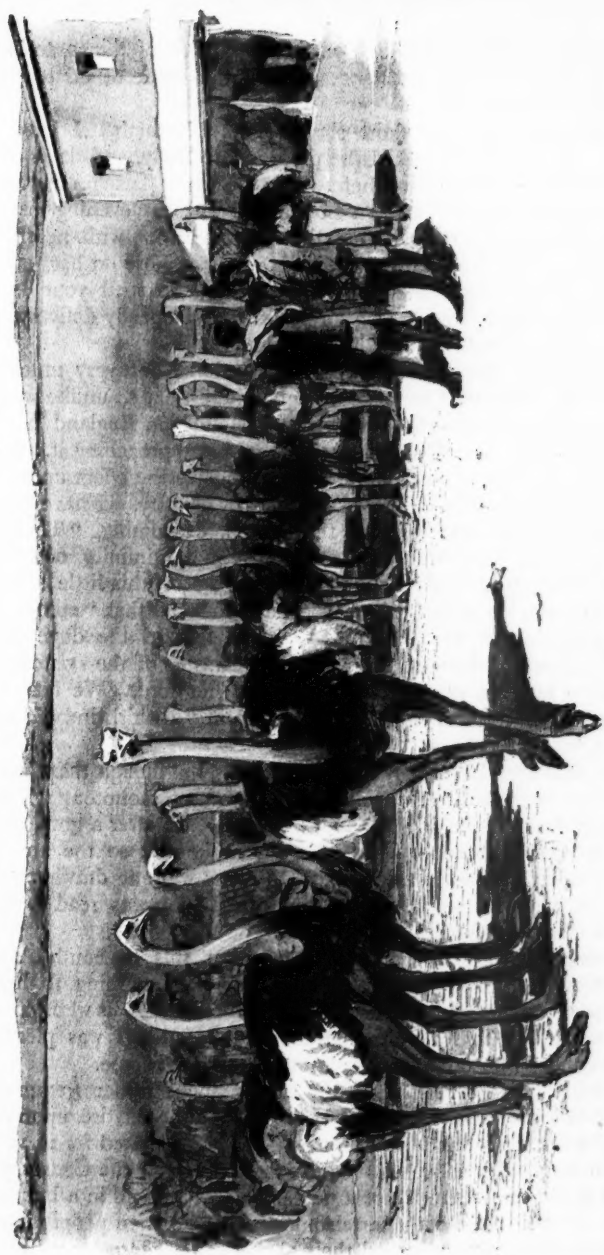
was in repose; banks and stores were still closed and shuttered. The jetty was wide and well supplied with cranes and tramway rails: all an admirable piece of workmanship. Even from here the public buildings looked substantially built and imposing. At the other end of the jetty was a large Custom-House on one side, and a new railway station on the other, that, in everything but size would compare favourably with any of its rivals in England. Some will say Why not? but South Africa is a new country: it has taken England long years to reach her present state of luxurious perfection.

Port Elizabeth is built on rising ground, which adds very much to its charm. This we noticed even before landing. At the end of the jetty a long sloping hill stretches away in front of you, the distance crowned with churches and other imposing buildings. Unfortunately this was all we were able to see of the place; a distant view, a mere impression. Our train was to start half an hour after landing, and as trains do not run here as often as they run in England, we were not able to wait for another. We had a long journey of some ten or twelve hours before us ere reaching Grahamstown.

The lightness and brightness which characterised Port Elizabeth, the clear and pleasant atmosphere, perhaps may have something to do with the general industry and prosperity of its inhabitants. It is so much easier to work successfully under sunny skies.

We did not land alone. Not a few of the remaining passengers were bound for Port Elizabeth, returning either from England or from Cape Town. One of these, a gentleman who seemed to have control of everything and everyone in the place, was good enough to take us in hand, and quickly passed us through the ceremony of the Custom-House; but we had left most of our baggage on board and had nothing to declare. When all was over, porters shouldered our traps and disappeared like lightning across the road into the station. Had we been alone, we might have supposed—so sudden and quick were their movements—that these natives had performed a raid upon us, just as in the old days they would come down marauding upon towns and settlements. But it was all right.

H. had taken a leaf out of my book and landed with the most severe headache of his life. Fortunately we had the carriage to ourselves, and I built him a comfortable couch with bags and rugs; but he seemed so ill that I felt anxious and wondered if it would prove more than headache. It is my unhappy way to look rather on the dark side of things, in spite of doctors' assurances of a "sanguine temperament;" but I think that such a mental condition must come to all who have passed through years of unusual sorrow and trouble. Added to this a phrenologist was once good enough to say that I had not "sufficient hope to be constitutionally happy:" and ever since I have wished for a large measure of hope in all those in whom I am specially interested; to every one of them a Pandora's



OSTRICH FARM.]

box as a life treasure. To look on the bright side of things, to hope for the best under all circumstances, is half the battle of existence—and half its success.

We much regretted our short stay at Port Elizabeth. I have an idea that we should have liked the place exceedingly, and it is said that many nice people live here. But necessity has no law. It would never do to arrive at East London on Tuesday evening instead of Tuesday morning, only to find that the *Dunottar*, with nearly all our worldly goods, had started just twelve hours before on her way to Durban. So, having fulfilled our prophecy and dropped your letter into the Post Office, with a wish for its safe and speedy delivery, we presently steamed out of the railway station.

Of this long and monotonous journey I have not very much to record; and yet to us it was exceedingly interesting, so unlike was it to one's ordinary European experiences. Neither in England nor in any other part of Europe do we possess anything approaching it. It is difficult to describe, almost impossible to conceive the effect upon the mind of these immense, unlimited stretches of country. I have heard of people bursting into tears as they gazed, exclaiming, "There is so much of it!" In truth one seems lost in an infinity of space, when contemplating these boundless tracts: and if this little spot of earth has such an effect upon us, what about all that "eternity of space" by which we are surrounded? One feels as the dove must have felt when she hovered over the wide waste of the waters of the Deluge and found no resting-place for her foot. We lose our own identity and seem to be swallowed up in "a whirlwind of space and ages."

I have said that the journey was monotonous, but though there was a certain amount of sameness about it, there was no monotony; it was interesting from beginning to end. Happily H. after a good sleep woke up with headache gone, altogether himself; so the anxious clouds rolled away, and we were able to enjoy without drawback all that might come before us. Once more the lesson was read to look on the bright side of life.

The train was very slow and deliberate, but this in South Africa for the most part goes without saying. They have nothing to hurry for on these occasions, and accept life as it comes. To us who wanted to take everything in leisurely, this condition of things was pleasant and agreeable; but, often repeated, must grow wearisome.

On first leaving Port Elizabeth the train stopped rather frequently. There were such stations as Zwartskops—no doubt a satire upon the heads of the natives; and Red House—which we looked for in vain: just as in England if a house is named the Poplars or the Cedars, you may be quite sure there is not a poplar or a cedar within a hundred miles of it: and the most quarrelsome and unchristian people it was ever my lot to encounter, called their abode the *Agapemone*: all part and parcel of the eternal *unfitness* of things.

After the absent Red House came Coerney, by which time we had done some forty miles of the journey.

This place is said to be quite civilised, and has an hotel, fairly frequented, as good sport is to be found in the neighbourhood, and the once plentiful elephants still pay it angels' visits. In this neighbourhood also is the wonderful Zuurberg Pass, with an hotel at the very summit. How we longed to make the ascent cannot be told. Three miles of dense bush country leads you to the foot of the mountains: and then a gradual ascent of seven miles brings you to the inn, 3000 feet above the level of the sea. The views as you ascend are rich and varied, hills and forests, valleys and occasional water lending all their enchantment to the scene. From the summit you may gaze over a marvellous extent of country to the far-off Indian Ocean, sleeping under molten skies. All this we had to leave unseen, simply because time would not stand still. Such is the malignant crossness of events, and such the inevitableness of nature's laws.

More often than not, we found that the station was a solitary building in the midst of a vast and desolate tract of country, and one wondered what it was doing there, and why it existed at all, and where those who alighted disappeared to. But very often no one got out, and no one got in. These vast tracts of bush are bidding their time. Where railways come civilisation must follow, towns and cities must spring up, and presently vast populations arise. So will it be with South Africa, when you and I, Care Amice, shall long have passed into the unseen and the unknown.

What pleased us most in this journey was the aspect of the country. Its boundless extent; its wonderful desolation and solitude; the distant hills that now and then bounded the horizon, curious in form, as nearly all the South African hills and mountains are. But above and beyond all was the wealth and luxuriance of the wild, uncultivated vegetation, which here grew, neither let nor hindered by the hand of man. For hours and hours we passed through such country, which seemed to grow and flourish only for its own pleasure, and for the birds that flew from tree to tree: small paroquets with their red bills and lovely plumage; or more gorgeous kingfishers and other birds, that looked, as I have already remarked, like magnificent fragments of intensified rainbow flashing about. I can think of no better comparison.

Very often the country seemed one succession of billowy undulations, as if a mighty ocean had once had its home there, and had now retired or dried up, leaving its impression upon the earth for ever.

The trees were wonderful; rather bushes than trees, perhaps, but full of grace and beauty. Trailing creepers seemed to hang from the boughs, full of gorgeous colouring. Beneath them was an undergrowth of smaller bushes and flowering shrubs; the wild geranium flaming up in trees of immense circumference, the pelargonium

conspicuous. Wild flowers of every description abounded. All this wealth and wildness never ceased. Anything more beautiful could not be imagined. The eye was almost surfeited with beauty, for the charm was never-ending.

In such a journey monotony was impossible; it yielded the greatest and purest delight.

Here and there tracts seemed to have been cleared. Occasionally a farmhouse appeared on the scene, only to make the surrounding desolation more felt. Now and then we caught sight of a number of ostriches lifting their long necks to the skies, and walking whither they liked. But they always have a keeper at hand, and it may be that they have no wandering tendencies, no ambition to roam beyond their little world. Moreover there are boundaries set, though invisible from our point of view.

They are somewhat ungainly birds, as you well know, who have seen them in Egypt. But out here, roaming these wild solitudes, they do not look unpicturesque. They seem to fit in with the scenery, just as you may have remarked does the camel, when he is crossing the Sahara or any other great desert. Lions and tigers would no doubt look equally in place in these vast solitudes, and the more gentle and intelligent elephant; but they are never seen here now: they have retired to still more remote and desolate fastnesses, and have become almost a tradition. Where a railway comes, and where man is occasionally found, there will the wild beasts of prey seldom venture.

As far as I am concerned, I don't know that I should have considered a herd of lions an agreeable sight. Like our good friend the Dutch minister at Stellenbosch, I am for peace, and if I must encounter lions and tigers, I prefer them behind the safe bars of the Zoological Gardens. H. looked a little pitying and contemptuous when I made some such remark in our progress. To penetrate into the interior on a lion-hunting expedition, would to him just now be Elysium. So every age brings its appropriate desire and delight. For me the lion-hunting age is over, if it ever existed, which I much doubt. All this is a question of nerve and muscle and powers of endurance. It has nothing to do with mere courage, but is born of skill, and the love of adventure and enterprise; good and wholesome and charming for those who possess all the attributes which go to the making of a great hunter of the far west. I have to be satisfied with seeing these things with others' eyes.

The ostriches being tamer creatures, we viewed with calmer emotions.

Historically they bear some interest, since their plumes have long been held in such high esteem. In days gone by they were almost always the mark of royalty, so costly was the adornment. The shy birds were difficult to capture, and there was the great fear of extinction if carried to excess. Perhaps they first rose in English

estimation when the Black Prince at the Battle of Crecy in 1346, slew the King of Bohemia, and plucking the ostrich feathers from the king's helmet, placed them in his own : since when, as we know, three ostrich feathers have formed the crest of the Princes of Wales.

But for many a long century after this, no one ever attempted to trade very much in ostrich feathers, or to dream of domesticating these huge birds, more shy than the gazelle, wilder than the curlew.

Not until the year 1864 was anything of the sort essayed in South Africa, when some young ostriches were captured by two farmers



TEA PLANTATION.

with a view to taming them for purposes of trade. They were fairly successful, yet the industry would probably have died out but for the discovery of the incubating machine. It was always easy to get the eggs, but not so easy to capture the birds—which, by the way, are said to be not half so stupid as the world supposes. I do not know how this may be, but cannot imagine very much sense in those very small heads. How greatly the trade prospered may be gathered from the fact that the export of feathers in 1865 was valued at about £65,000 : whilst in 1882 it was valued at over £1,000,000 sterling. Since then

it has somewhat declined, owing to some disease attacking the young birds.

At the present time there are said to be about 150,000 domesticated ostriches in Cape Colony, in which £8,000,000 of capital are invested.

So here is another great industry added to fruit-growing, and vintage, and the wealth of mines, in all which South Africa is or may be so abundantly blessed. Her buried riches—who can tell them?

A visit to an ostrich farm is certainly one of the things to do in South Africa, as well as one of the most interesting: far more so, to my thinking, than exploring a diamond mine at Kimberley or a gold mine at Johannesburg. The largest farms are in the Eastern Province of Cape Colony, some of them having an extent of 13,000 acres. To an English farmer, who thinks his 400 acres a very respectable estate, this will pass quite beyond the bounds of his imagination: just as we are unable to realise the distance to the nearest fixed star, however exactly the number of miles may stare us in the face in black and white. They live chiefly on a mixture of grass, Karoo, which is a sort of heather, and young and tender bushes. About 1000 birds constitute a large farm.

The whole farm is enclosed by wire fence, five feet high, and this is one of the most expensive items at the outset in setting up an ostrich farm. The fence has to be high and strong, or the birds would easily break through.

Each farm is again subdivided into various camps of different sizes. Near the houses the camps are about 100 acres each, and these belong to the young birds. These young birds are generally in the care of Hottentots, who take them in hand and feed them almost from the time they are hatched. As a rule they are strong and thrive well and grow quickly. They chiefly need warmth and to be kept dry, and if they are out when a shower comes on, you may see 20 or 30 of these small birds running after the Hottentot, just as, at home, a brood of chickens will follow a hen. Their food is grass finely cut up, gravel, broken bones, and a sort of oatmeal.

Other camps are of 25 acres, and each one of these is given up entirely to a royal ostrich king and queen.

Again there are camps of nearly 3000 acres, containing 150 or 200 birds, who thus have large roaming privileges. But all are closely tended by Hottentots or Kaffirs. There are outside dangers which have to be guarded against. As in England the wily fox runs off with our young turkeys and geese, so the wild carnivorous animals which abound in South Africa will run off with the young ostriches. None is more destructive than the jackal, and one of these animals alone will destroy a whole brood in one night. These depredators are kept at bay by laying down pieces of meat and strychnine round the camps, a method by which numbers are killed, and the game in the neighbourhood of the farms is preserved. The pieces of poisoned

meat do good service : they are keepers who never take to poaching on their own account ; they never strike, and give no trouble. Near these farms you may see the graceful antelope bounding about : and if you are a fair shot and on friendly terms with the farm keeper, he will certainly give you a chance of carrying away a fine pair of horns.

In another camp there is a nest, and here we are in some danger. The male bird is not only strong but fierce. His the task to sit on the nest by night, the female taking her turn by day. Before entering this camp a thorn bush is given to you, and if the male bird shows symptoms of attack, this bush must be held to his eyes. Amongst the Karoo bushes you catch sight of the nest and the hen bird, who immediately straightens her neck on the ground and does her best to conceal herself. In this position she looks very much like a monster ant-heap, and she is probably wise enough to know this. Suddenly, with angry cry, the male bird, having caught sight of the intruders, charges swiftly down upon them. As they have been known to kill a man, the attack is serious ; but the thorn bush is all-sufficient. He cannot pass it without blinding himself, and though he tries to dodge round, you must be equally clever in giving him no quarter. If you are attacked unawares by an ostrich the best thing is to throw yourself flat on the ground. The higher the point of attack, the more strength have they in their legs, possessing very little as the foot nears the earth.

The moment you reach the nest and take up the egg, you may lay down the thorn bush. The male bird immediately loses all his anger and becomes cowed, uttering a sad cry, which is a distinct pleading for the protection of his egg.

In this he shows both intelligence and feeling, and hard must be the heart that could rob him of his cherished treasure, in which he has the wisdom to know lurks an offspring that in a few weeks may become the pride of his ostrich heart. The eggs weigh about three pounds each, and the nest is nothing but a sandy hollow, too often an insufficient protection against carnivora or heavy rains.

The carrion crows are a great source of danger. They are very clever and cunning. As their bills are not strong enough to break the eggs, they carry up a stone in their claws and drop it down upon the nest. Every nest contains about fifteen eggs—the number of an ordinary brood. The period of incubation is six weeks. Many of the ostrich farms are also dairy farms : and at certain hours, if you visit the kraals, you may see from 70 to 100 cows being milked by the Kaffirs. The cattle eat the coarse grass which is rejected by the more delicate ostrich, and thus nothing is wasted.

But this is a slight digression from our journey towards Grahams-town, though scarcely out of place. Yet it is certain that neither farmhouses, nor ostrich farms with their invisible boundaries, nor groups of birds stalking about and enjoying life in their own way, gave

us a tithe of the delight that we found in all the wonderful and unlimited stretches of country, covered with their wealth of trees and shrubs, creepers and wild flowers.

Often the train moved so slowly that we had to place a restraint upon ourselves not to jump out and pluck handfuls of wild geraniums or fuchsias or wild lilies, or jessamine, or flaming blossoms of the *poynsettia* species; and catching up the train again, re-enter the carriage with a wealth of wild beauty. It would often have been quite possible, only there was the fear that in the malignant crossness of events already quoted, once out of the train the engine would at once put on express steam and fly off at the rate of at least ten miles an hour.

So the lovely ride, the lovely morning, and the lovely vision which rejoiced our eyes continued for many hours without interruption. It was one grand, ceaseless progress amidst such wealth and beauty and colouring of nature, as I think we had never dreamed of; certainly never seen in so great abundance.

"And this is the journey that we were told would prove so infinitely monotonous and uninteresting," said H. "What can such people be made of?"

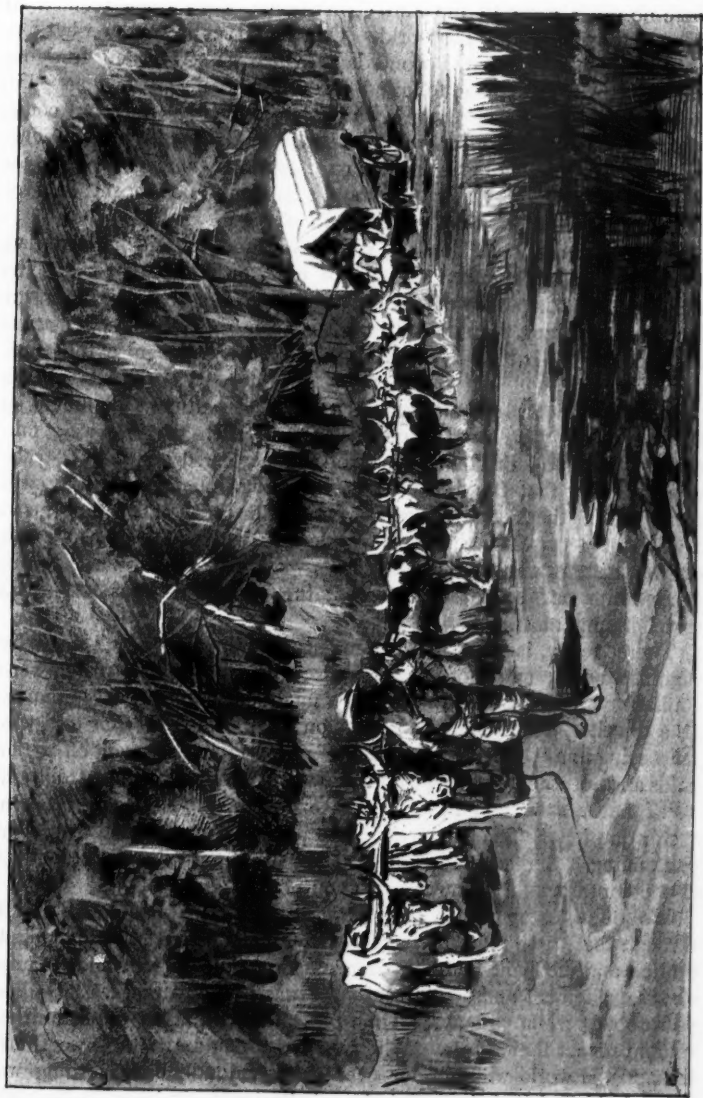
"It is difficult to say. Every foot of our way has been full of indescribable charm. We might make the journey every day for a month, only to find, day by day, fresh beauties and delight."

"What a region for a botanising tour," he exclaimed. "But instead of a candle-box, I think we should need a waggon for our hoards. It seems to me that the specimens both of ferns and wild flowers are unlimited."

"I believe they are so. No country is so rich in flora as South Africa, though the absolute reason for this does not seem to be known. But the soil is evidently productive and the climate perfect, and we see the amazing result."

We had passed more stations on our way. *Mimosa*—so named, perhaps, because the beautiful *mimosa* thorn flourishes so largely in the neighbourhood, with its gorgeous yellow flowers; a name which brought Scott to our memory, and *Marmion*; those lines in which he exclaims "For not *mimosa*'s tender tree shrinks sooner from the touch." I suppose all we were passing through would be called Bush country; certainly it is wild and desolate enough, but it is very lovely, and one can hardly fancy that even long years of residence in these solitudes would uncivilise one. We seem for ever in communion with the highest and best that is in nature; with earth in all her glory and beauty, as she was fashioned in those days when it was said of her: "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind; . . . and it was so. . . . And God saw that it was good."

After *Mimosa*, with its lovely suggestions, came Sandflats, also true to its name, and surrounded by an arid, sandy soil, where the



TRAVELLING IN SOUTH AFRICA. TEAM OF BULLOCKS FORDING A STREAM.

bushes just managed to sustain life. And then Bellevue, where again vegetation was rich and rare.

But all these stations were the very picture of desolation. There were no other signs of life and civilisation. They alone seemed to possess the earth and the world. One could only wonder what lay beyond, and where that Beyond lay. Once we saw a man trudging alone through the wilds, followed by a lean, half-starved dog. He looked like a pedlar or packman, or something of the sort, but could scarcely have been so, for where in these wilds would he find customers? The native ladies, if they exist, adorn themselves in blankets—lovely creatures!—and bonnets and silk stuffs and decent drapery to them would be works of supererogation.

And so we reached Alicedale, which is a junction, and here we had to change carriages, and wait half an hour or more. The day was wearing onwards, and we were beginning to feel that the hour for luncheon had long passed, and that it is an indisputable law of nature that man must eat to live. But they scarcely recognise the truth on this line.

Here at Alicedale there certainly was a department dignified by the name of *buffet*, but the delicacies were such that we were fain to fall back upon dry bread—not of the newest description. Once more we felt that South Africa is yet in its infancy; the day will come when these matters will have to be seen to. Sir James Sivewright recognised the want and endeavoured to improve the existing state of things, but his efforts were negated by a majority against him, and so for the moment the opportunity was lost—and travellers must fast.

There really is a small settlement at Alicedale which may be dignified by the name of village. Also, the surrounding plains were brilliant with wild flowers, which now might be gathered in abundance. One traveller, a lady who had been on board the *Dunottar* and was journeying in a “ladies’ compartment,” next to our own, went off to the fields and returned bending under the weight of her gorgeous trophies.

“I never saw such flowers,” she exclaimed; “have never taken such a journey. The whole thing has passed like a dream or a fairy pantomime. Surely this is the land of fairies, and the whole country is one enormous fairy bower. Do you not think so?”

We quite entered into her enthusiasm, for we also had felt all through that these must be the Elysian Fields. H.’s Elysium might be lion and elephant hunting—here was ours: calmness and beauty *versus* excitement and adventure. He was no doubt right. “Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.” Time flies all too quickly; opportunities seldom repeat themselves. When we are young and strong we think life and the world will last for ever; and suddenly one morning we wake up to find that the grasshopper is beginning to be a burden and lion hunting has lost its charm: and we have not made as much of our opportunities as we might have done.

Walking about the platform, waiting for our train to arrive, feasting our eyes upon the surrounding country—a certain compensation for the physical fasting we had to undergo—the Bishop of Grahamstown, who had arrived by train from an opposite direction came up and introduced himself to us, and was exceedingly kind, volunteering to do anything in his power and inviting us to spend part of the next day with him. As we wished to see all we could and our time was limited, it was arranged that we should join him after evening service, and take supper with him. His lordship has been travelling through some part of his enormous diocese, on a confirmation tour: and the fatigue sometimes undergone on these occasions must be enormous. What a different life from anything we find or dream of in our small and civilised England! And yet it seems to me that to live and labour in one of these gigantic countries ought to give one a breadth of mind, a broadness of vision, a depth of sympathy, almost impossible to those who dwell in “smaller circles.”

After leaving Alicedale, when more than two-thirds of our journey was over, the character of the scenery changed. We continued in an easterly direction: the other line leading to Colesberg and Bloemfontein—which we hope to see on our way back to Cape Town.

The aspect of the country was now altered. Huge hills rose about us, with long sweeping undulations wild and barren. Hitherto we had rejoiced in plains adorned with every species of wildflower; a prodigal luxuriance of nature in which man had no part; now the wildness was all desolation, and the effect instead of being exhilarating was depressing. Scarce a tree or shrub was to be seen. The hills were covered with a sombre green, a singular and mournful depth of colouring. To the expanse there seemed no end. On one side the line occasionally opened onto precipitous depths. Far down one gazed upon fertile valleys, the homes of immense flocks of sheep and other cattle. Farm-houses were here and there visible, with their white walls and black roofs; picturesque objects, as I have remarked, that almost added to the desolation and solitude.

Towards evening, approaching Grahamstown, we passed into a more civilised and cultivated country. The hills fell back in wavy undulations, hill behind hill, as if here, too, the sea had once held sway and retired, leaving its mark for ever. Distance and expanse were beautiful. Sights and sounds of life also began to multiply themselves and we felt that we were once more entering into inhabited regions.

Finally we approached Grahamstown itself and looked down upon it from our superior height. It was beautifully and romantically situated on the slopes of the Zuurburg Mountains, of which I have mentioned the Pass near Coerney. All round it rose these protecting hills with their gentle undulations. Vegetation seemed almost tropical in its luxuriance. From the centre uprose the beautiful spire of the Cathedral; one of the highest in the Colony, designed by Sir Gilbert

Scott, though I believe he had no concern with the main body of the building.

The train rolled in to the platform, and after our long day through profound solitudes, we found ourselves in the midst of quite a bewildering crowd. Here we bade a temporary farewell to the Bishop, who was anxious to return home to a delicate and invalid wife, and "each went his separate way."

We found the hotel omnibus waiting for us, and on the platform an hotel porter trying to distinguish us amidst the crowd. They have an instinct, these men, which seldom fails them, and so of course we were immediately discovered and appropriated. For we were expected, having telegraphed our arrival. We had thought it an unnecessary precaution, but the hotel proved fairly full. The best rooms, however, which our host apologised for not giving us, were in possession of visitors that were more trouble than profit to him, and certainly more free than welcome. These were nothing less than sundry rats behind the wainscotting, who had waxed so bold that war to the death had now to be waged against them. "Of course, sir," said the landlord, "there are the rooms, at your service, but I can hardly advise your occupying them. They come out and play high jinks at night." The expression was our host's, and we have no doubt it was very graphic and accurate; and we so far endorsed his opinion as to prefer the comparative discomfort of two small rooms downstairs—the only alternative at his disposal.

So here we were settled until Monday morning, and it seemed to us as a long spell of rest and repose.

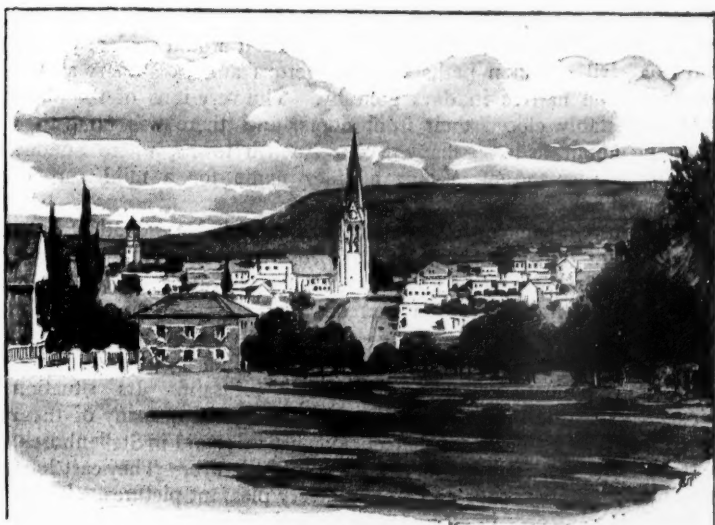
We found the hotel quite civilised, and the landlord anxious to do his utmost: no doubt influenced by a note from Sir James Sive-wright, and also a message from the Bishop, who had been good enough to tell us to make use of his name. As the landlord was a thorough churchman, we could not have brought a better passport to his favour. We found table d'hôte an institution here, and much better than one could have expected: and if all the other rooms were small, the dining-room was large and airy, and the tables were adorned with snow-white linen.

After dinner, when darkness was falling, we went out to see what might be visible of the town. In a quiet way it seemed very flourishing. It is the seat of two Bishoprics, the Anglican and the Roman Catholic. The latter has also a college, and, I almost think, a monastery or convent. But the recognised religion is of course the Protestant, and the Cathedral in High Street is a conspicuous building. Just now it is undergoing alterations, and we did not see it to advantage.

Grahamstown was once a military station, but this has been removed, to the regret of the inhabitants; for in those days it was one of the gayest and pleasantest places in the whole Colony, and boasted its best society, Cape Town excepted. It still possesses its law courts,

and so though the military element is removed, the legal still remains. But there is a possibility that the courts will also be transferred elsewhere, and then Grahamstown will feel as if it had received its social death-blow.

In days gone by the military element was needed for use as well as ornament. The town was founded in 1812: and in 1819 it became a military station. In those days the savage natives gave trouble, and the district for many years was in constant warfare. The whole neighbourhood, hills and valleys, can tell terrible stories of inroad and bloodshed. In 1819 the settlement was attacked by a force of natives 10,000 strong, but they were driven back with great loss by a garrison of only 320 men. Again they charged down in 1834, when



GRAHAMSTOWN.

many of the settlers were murdered and much property was destroyed. In 1846, there was fighting again in the defiles of the Amatola Mountains: and again three years later many of the settlers—farmers and their families—were massacred. Since 1853, Grahamstown has been in peace, and all fears of invasion are supposed to be at an end.

In the large and admirable Town Hall, we found a very fine and well-organised Library, and from the Librarian received great courtesy. He placed everything at our disposal, but as it was now Saturday night, and the Library is closed on Sunday, and we were to leave at 6.30 on Monday morning, we were unable to do more than glance at the most interesting collection of volumes. The hall also contains an excellent museum, a ball and concert room, and a large

Council Chamber. So the people of Grahamstown are not only enterprising, but evidently have the good taste to love music and dancing. The exterior is distinguished by a square clock-tower, built on arches over the front pavement, commemorating the bravery of the settlers in 1820 when invaded by the natives.

The next morning, Sunday, rose bright and clear; not a cloud in the sky. Grahamstown looked its very best.

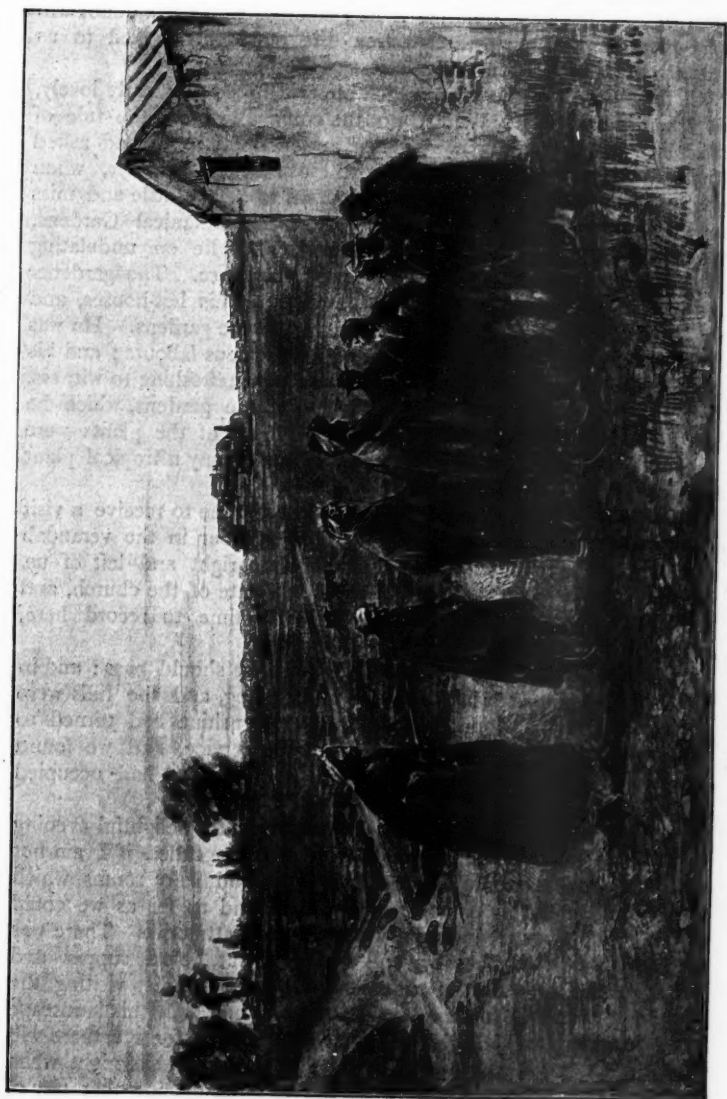
Such a "Sabbath-stillness," such an observance of the day, we scarcely ever found, even in the severest of Scotch Presbyterian towns. There was scarcely a person visible in the streets; not a vehicle of any sort or description; the very cats and dogs seemed to know that it was not a day for frivolous frolics and barks and bites, for they kept well within doors, or gravely and sedately occupied the doorsteps.

Not a sound disturbed the prevailing quiet. No shop or store of any sort or description was open—this indeed would evidently have led to a civil rebellion perhaps as dangerous and sanguinary as the wars with the natives in days gone by. The very inns of the place had respectably closed their front doors, and there was no listless lounging about, as in so many of our English towns, where Sunday evening is now too often only another name for a mild sort of Pandemonium.

Here in Grahamstown the quiet was remarkable. Had it been a colony of Quakers or Scotch Covenanters it could not have been more rigidly observed. Our landlord told us it is always so; and as a rule, if you want a cart on the Sunday—their name for the fashionable conveyance of the country—you cannot have it.

We went out after breakfast, and found Grahamstown, in the daylight and Sabbath stillness, exceedingly pleasant. Its situation singularly beautiful; its streets all wide thoroughfares, many of them lined with trees: not the magnificent avenues we found in Stellenbosch, but all the same charming and refreshing to the eye. They cast long shadows upon the roads and so made very pleasant pictures. There is a certain sameness in all these South African towns, but few possess the charm of situation that belongs to this capital of the Eastern Provinces.

It is also considered one of the healthiest places in South Africa, and many invalids come here for restoration to health. For my own part, I should prefer the higher plateaus, where at 6000 feet above the level of the sea, you find an air exhilarating as champagne, and where people ought to become centenarians and then die young. Grahamstown, surrounded by its hills, lovely though they are, must be more or less relaxing; but in cases of consumption it is said to perform wonders: completely curing those who in an adverse climate might have only a few months to live. It has the lowest mean temperature in summer of all towns in the Eastern Provinces; and then occurs the largest rainfall, so that its climate is especially dry. It is 1800 feet above the level of the sea.



ZULUS SEEN ON OUR WAY TO EAST LONDON.

We attended the cathedral in the morning, but as I have said, it is undergoing repair, and the service had to be held under drawbacks. They are building a new chancel, which no doubt will be a great improvement, though from the outside it looked to us almost out of proportion with the rest of the building.

Of the suburbs of the town, which are said to be singularly lovely, we could see nothing. We had not the courage to break the rule of the place and ask for a conveyance, and possibly if we had asked it might have been in vain. In these hurried journeys, when absolutely tied to time, one must be content to see a little and miss much. But in the afternoon we visited the Botanical Gardens, said to be the finest in South Africa. They lie on undulating ground, which adds to their picturesque appearance. The gardener in his Sunday best, happened to be watering his hot-houses, and seeing our interest, he carefully took us round the gardens. He was a Scotchman and gave us a history of his previous labours; and his genuine love and enthusiasm for his work were refreshing to witness. None seemed to afford him the delight of these gardens, which he had helped to bring to such perfection. Many of the plants were rare and curious, many unknown to us; and many a tropical plant and tree grew in the open air.

We went back to the hotel, and were just in time to receive a visit from the Dean, and we sat together for an hour in the verandah overlooking the road, with the distant hills to right and left of us. He told us many things about the place, the state of the church, and South Africa in general, which I have no time to record here, and which perhaps would scarcely interest you.

So the day passed quietly, as the Day of Rest should pass: and in the evening when the shadows were lengthening, and the hills were putting on a deeper tone, and the brilliant sunshine had turned to gold and crimson, the bells rang out for service, and we found ourselves in the same seats in the Cathedral that we had occupied not many hours before.

After service we joined the Bishop, and spent a delightful evening with him. Bishopsbourne—as the residence is called if I am not mistaken—is a charming house with large and lofty rooms which must form an earthly paradise in summer: and as far as we could see, the grounds surrounding it were unusually attractive. There was a silvery moon in the sky, and we went out before supper and wondered at the charm of the scene. To some ladies visiting the Bishop of course its romance especially appealed. All this landscape touched with the pale light was as a dream. But for me there will never again be such moonlight as on that memorable night when together we visited the Tombs of the Caliphs outside that city of Mosques and Minarets, Cairo the Beautiful. All other nights and all other comparisons pale before it. Even the moonlit Pyramids, with all their greatness and all their antiquity; even the Sphinx with all its

mystery ; did not equal that wonderful night : partly perhaps because it had in it the charm of the unexpected ; somewhat it may be, because of the mesmeric charm of your companionship.

Nevertheless it was very lovely, that night at Bishopsbourne ; and when we had said good-bye, and walked through the silent roads to our hotel, we felt that the evening had thrown its halo over a quiet but notable day. All was pleasant to look back upon and to remember. Our minds become a series of mental photographs as the years go on : and it is well that what is best and happiest dwells longest in the memory. Just as, of those near and dear to us who have passed away, we remember only the good. Evidently, therefore, good is the strongest of all powers and the most lasting.

The next morning we had to rise early. We were to go to King Williamstown by cart—post cart, carrier's cart, whatever you like to call it, so that your name shall express something very uncomfortable, conducted by an exceedingly surly and uncivil driver. At 6.30 it was to start, and our landlord informed us that like time and tide, it would wait for no man. Consequently by 6.30 we had risen, breakfasted, paid our modest reckoning, and were ready. The punctual cart was of course behind time, and it was seven o'clock before we found ourselves passing out of Grahamstown.

Of our journey I must tell you in my next letter. We are now at East London, surely the most hope-forgotten place under the sun. A hurricane is blowing such as the inhabitants scarcely remember. Deluges of rain are coming down accompanied by squalls that are simply appalling. A furious sea is raging, waves are running mountains high. Outside lies the *Dunottar Castle* : but nothing can come to us from her, and nothing from us can reach her. All communication is impossible : and oh, horror of horrors, it is said that she may probably go off to Durban and leave us to expire of despair. The inn is conducted on the principles of a public-house ; it is crowded with a noisy set of men, who make life a nightmare to us ; our own wretched rooms are our only refuge ; twenty times in an hour we go out to consult the skies, only to find them growing darker and more lowering, the rain more deluging, the hurricane more furious. Not far off we hear the roaring and beating of the waves upon the shore ; a hundred yards away the *Dunottar* rides upon the storm, strong, determined, invincible : and this hundred yards of boiling foam is just what lies between us and happiness.

What will be the result ?



THE UNBIDDEN GUEST.

A TRUE STORY.

[The following is fact, and given with but such slight and unimportant modifications as circumstances have required.]

NEVER, within the memory of the "oldest inhabitant," had the town been thrown into a state of excitement by the announcement of royal entertainment equal to that awakened by the issuing of cards for the historical ball given in Turin in 18— by the Duke and Duchess of Aosta.

It fairly set the entire population chattering. The invited rejoiced—the would-be-invited intrigued for a card—the tongues of the remainder teemed with tales of impossible preparations and unheard-of splendour. The happy possessors of the royal mandate might have been seen hurrying from jeweller to dressmaker, bootmaker to tailor, antiquary to museum ; or else discovered deep in research amid time-honoured folios and curios, overhauling and overturning all that came in their way or bore reference to the secretly chosen costume. Happy indeed, was he or she who had been fortunate enough to unearth from antique cabinet and chest an old-fashioned jewel or piece of brocade which had once been the property of some long-departed ancestor or great-grandmother, and which had been, by disrespectful moderns, consigned to darkness and the lingering odour of perfumes of the past.

A month had been allowed for preparation. But then the preparation was expected to be perfect. The Duchess was not the woman to allow any anachronism to escape her, nor to spare the unlucky perpetrator her opinion of the same.

Perhaps in all Europe there is not a pleasanter court than that of Italy. There is sufficient etiquette to maintain prestige, but no more. Guests are received, not only with kingly courtesy, but also with kindly cordiality. Sociability is never suffered to freeze to death under the ice of ceremony.

There is little of the starch and stateliness of Berlin ; the heraldic hierarchy of Vienna ; the alternative frost and thaw of London ; nor are guests herded according to their rank, in three separate saloons as in Copenhagen ; nor is there vestige of the *noli me tangere* system of the sundry yet-existing German courtlets.

At the Italian Court, on the contrary, you are sure of a smile and a word of welcome, and are as free to enjoy yourself as if there were no such things on earth as a grand master of the ceremonies and the Almanach de Gotha. They are, doubtless, both useful in their way—but, like garlic, need to be employed sparingly in order to be palatable.

As the all-important day drew nigh individual anxiety and public curiosity increased. Years of experience had taught that the "to-morrow" of Bellezza the jeweller, and of Madame L'Abbé the dress-maker, was unpleasantly like that of the Spaniards, and apt never to arrive. So that many were the broughams to be seen standing before the doors of the respective establishments, and many the anxious countesses and marchionesses awaiting within the said vehicles their turn of admission. For Madame L'Abbé's rooms were limited in number; and, as secrecy was naturally to be preserved, she could only receive a very few applicants at a time.

In one of the snug, remodernised rooms of the venerable Castle of Rocca d'Oro sat the young mistress of countless acres and almost untold wealth. A bright fire was blazing in the huge chimney, nobly fed with logs, whose size and number would have made a dweller in cities stare.

The firelight flung cheery, changeful gleams upon all within the apartment—upon the gilt mouldings of the ceiling, the mellow pictures, the richly-tinted stuffs, and many-hued porcelains—playing here and there in fitful caprice; now sinking low as if to gather fresh strength for a sudden joyous outburst such as put to shame the tall wax lights upon the tea-table and make them grow yellow with envy.

The big brass breguet upon the quaintly carved chimney-piece chimed out nine, and, before the last vibration had died upon the perfumed tepid atmosphere, the Marquis entered the room.

"How is he?" asked he as he took a seat opposite his wife.

"Much better, God be thanked. The doctor says that all danger is over."

The Marquis gave a deep sigh of relief. And well he might. For it was a question of his only child, a boy of eight, who, having managed to tumble into a pond, had incurred, not the danger of drowning, for the water was shallow, but an attack of fever which threatened to take a bad turn.

"Well, if that's the case, we can take our tea in comfort, Cordelia. There, don't stir, I'll wheel the table round to you."

He did so, and then resumed his seat; the soft light of the tapers falling full upon his handsome features.

"The doctor says Guido will be up in three days, and able to go out before the week is over," said the Marchioness handing her husband his cup.

"Better and better. Poor boy! He has had an ugly bout of it!"

"Yes, indeed. I don't know if, even with his strong constitution, he would have got through it if it had not been for dear old Brigitta. She never left him night or day."

"I know it. She is the model of a servant of days gone by, and I don't wonder our aunt thought so much of her."

He lifted his eyes to the portrait over the chimney-piece as he spoke.

A large oval painting of an old lady in quaintly fashioned dress and a sort of black lace drapery above her snowy hair. An excellent likeness, as anyone could have told, with dark earnest eyes, a lovely complexion and well-cut features, upon which haughtiness and kindness were strangely blent.

"Even the old lady seems to smile down upon us," said the Marquis; "just look, Cordelia."

"You are right, Guido: it is almost like a living face."

The dancing firelight of course did it all, but it really did seem as if the features had become suddenly endowed with life.

"You will laugh at me, I know, but I assure you that at times I feel almost afraid of that picture."

"My dear Cordelia! Afraid of our poor old aunt! She to whom we owe everything!"

"Yes, I know that, but still——"

"Who, till her very last moment, showed herself full of loving forethought for us. And I am sure death has in no wise changed her. Who knows that she is not even now listening to what we are saying. Wrapped up as she was in the welfare of her house and lineage while on earth, do you think that she can have ceased to care for us now that she is no more among us? I don't."

"Oh, Guido, you make me feel quite creepy. I only hope that, if she ever should haunt the place, I may never see her! But I want to talk to you. The Duchess's ball. It takes place in less than three weeks, and—— You think we can go to it?"

"Of course we can. The boy, you say, is doing well, and will be out in a few days. We will take him with us to Turin—the change will do him good."

"And our dresses?"

"I shall go in the armour of our ancestor, Arduino della Rocca, and, if you will follow my suggestion, you will go as our good aunt over the chimney-piece there. With your hair powdered, and in such a dress, you will be her very picture."

"Oh Guido! Do you think she would like it? Just think! she may, as you said, be listening to us."

A sudden blaze of firelight sprang up and flung dancing gleams and shadows into every corner of the room.

"Look," continued Guido pointing to the portrait; "look and convince yourself."

Cordelia obeyed. And it really seemed as if the painting were nodding a willing consent.

"If Aunt Orsola is not smiling down upon us, I'm no sinner!"

The flame fell as suddenly as it had burst forth, and the portrait resumed its immobility in the steady glow of the wax lights.

"Then I will go as Aunt Orsola. There are loads of her old dresses up in the presses of her former rooms. I can easily have one of them lengthened. There are brocades among them that must be

priceless. One especially—red carnations on a gold ground—such a stuff!"

"Well, look it all out to-morrow. I am glad now I did not get the family diamonds reset. They will do famously, with their old-fashioned silver mountings. You shall show them all what a figure an Ivrea Châtelaine can cut at court if she pleases."

The ball had been fixed for Tuesday, and the preceding Saturday the Marquis, Marchioness, and Guido had arrived in Turin and taken possession of their rooms at the Hôtel d'Angleterra. They had always put up there, and thanks to their position, wealth and courteous bearing, had always been treated with marked respect and favour by the proprietor and his dependents. The apartment consisted of a drawing-room, bedroom and dressing-room on the first-floor, with windows fronting the royal palace on the opposite side of the square. This time another room, a few doors off, had been added for little Guido and his faithful old Brigitta.

As at Court balls the license of dropping in at all sorts of hours is not allowed, there was a considerable crush upon the grand staircase when the della Roccas entered the palace.

Once within the apartments, all discomfort was at an end. There the guests could circulate where and how they pleased. Little groups gathered here and there, chatting, laughing, criticising and observing—now breaking asunder to scatter for a moment; then re-forming the next minute—ever changing, and, kaleidoscope-like, ever producing fresh combinations of colour such as at once to attract, bewilder and please.

The whole scene represented a living page of Italian history, and in its complex brilliancy gave but small token of the patient research that had been needful to its composition.

The Marquis della Rocca d'Oro in the gold-embossed armour of his warlike ancestor, Sir Arduino, and the Marchioness in her magnificent red and gold brocade and family diamonds formed no insignificant feature of the glittering assembly.

Her husband had been right; Aunt Orsola's costume became her wonderfully, and her likeness to the oval portrait at the castle was extraordinary.

At eleven o'clock the folding-doors at the end of the suite were thrown open, and the Duke and Duchess of Aosta entered; he in the armour of the "Green Count," his ancestor, and one of the most valiant of the valiant Sabandan dynasty, his consort on his arm. Both well became the characters they had chosen—the Duke, a proud warrior in green harness; the Duchess, a right stately dame with regal mien, and looking more imposing than ever with her high coronet which, however correct, was hardly becoming.

Slowly the royal hosts made the tour of the rooms, welcoming their guests with cordiality, and enjoying to the full the scene which, so to

say, they had created. Then the quadrille of honour was formed, walked through, and the ball had fairly begun.

Needless, and as impossible as needless, to describe the hours that followed. Music, light, and perfume, beauty and brightness, the shimmer of stuffs and the sheen of jewels, the hum of voices and the occasional ripple of laughter, an ever-swaying, undulating crowd made up of all that rank, wealth and talent could furnish, the splendour of the past without its coarseness, the refinement of the present minus its monotony. Looking from the pillared ball-room down the vista of apartments right and left, the scene was such as must have stamped itself upon the memory of even the most unheeding.

At last the doors of the armoury were thrown open, and, headed by the Duke and Duchess, the company, two and two, filed in to supper.

Here, too, as far as was possible, the mediæval character had been preserved.

Midway down the long table rose a trophy of game—the centre an entire buck—and the board must literally have groaned under the weight of wild boar, enormous pasties, peacocks with spreading tails, fruit and flowers, massive plate and glittering glass, to say nothing of the castles in caramel, the fortresses in marzapane, and the hundred other cunningly devised dishes with which they were interspersed.

And added to all was the magnificence of the gallery in which the banquet was spread. The waving banners, the glittering arms, the suits of armour, the horses looking strangely real with their accoutrements; the thousand treasures of history and triumphs of art, in short, that render the collection superior to all that Europe can boast of, not excluding even the celebrated one of Madrid—all these need the pen of a Scott or the palette of a Kaulbach to do them justice.

So well had everything been organised that there was neither confusion nor delay, and every guest found him or herself marched to an appointed place by the pages stationed there for the purpose. Guido and his supper-partner were marshalled to seats not very far from the middle of the table where the Duke and Duchess presided. Countless wax-lights illuminated the scene, causing jewels to sparkle, armour to glitter, silk and velvet to glisten, glass and silver to flash. The tepid air was heavy with the aroma of rich wines. The fragrance of flushing fruit, the perfume of nodding flowers. The whole steeped in that warm, tremulous glow that nought but tapers can shed. The continued hum of voices formed a pleasant accompaniment to the ring of glass and the click of knife and fork, and the scene in its ensemble was such as poet might dream of and painter try to embody.

Guido della Rocca was enjoying himself thoroughly. His wife's appearance had been a decided triumph, and this had greatly gratified him; the Duke and Duchess had been especially friendly to both the Marchioness and himself; and the present scene accorded well with

a sentiment that had ever lurked in the breasts of all the della Rocca race, viz., the love of anything that smacked of chivalry, and a decided leaning towards everything that savoured of magnificence and pomp. His partner of the moment, too, had proved an amusing one. She was one of those women who, living *in* the world and *for* the world, make as pleasant companions for an hour, as they prove themselves troublesome mates for a lifetime. His left-hand neighbour, on the contrary, was a blue-stocking who, during the whole supper-time, had never ceased arguing with her cavalier and appealing to Guido to support her opinion of the motto of the House of Savoy being really "Vert," after the "Green Knight," and not "Fert," as erroneously supposed and adopted.

The meal, to which ample justice had been done, was drawing to a close; the grand attack had ended, and only the lighter skirmishing with bon-bons and similar trifles remained.

"How terribly warm it is getting!" said Guido's partner setting down her glass. "I wish they would open some of the windows!"

Mechanically Guido glanced across the table to the long row of windows opposite, and as he did so, a strange chill ran through his frame. It was as if an icy current had suddenly streamed over him, stirring his very hair, and curdling the warm blood in his veins.

"Do you find it so warm?" he began. "I——"

"There! the Duchess has risen, thank goodness. What an awful noise those trumpets are making! But, for Heaven's sake, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

For Guido, like all the rest, had risen; only unlike them, and instead of occupying himself in preparation for the impending march of exit, there he stood, with pale cheeks and staring eyes, gazing fixedly over at the window opposite.

"Are you ill?" she repeated.

"No—not ill—only a sudden spasm—it will be over directly—please take no notice of it."

Nobody else had remarked his agitation, for all were more or less occupied in shaking out skirts, smoothing down doublets and the like, previous to following the royal hosts out of the gallery in the same order in which they had entered.

A slight delay caused by the entangling of the Duchess's train in the "Green Count's" spur, luckily occurred, and afforded time for Guido to drink off the glass of wine that his companion pressed upon him. Then, immediately in front of them, another little impediment took place owing to a search having to be made for a middle-aged marchioness's shoe which she had slipped off at the beginning of supper to ease the pinching—penalty of trying to wear at fifty the size she had so lightly sported at fifteen—and which shoe had unwittingly been pushed by neighbours' feet to some distance down the table, beneath which it was ultimately discovered and restored to its embarrassed owner.

So these trifling halts gave Guido time to recover himself ; but, his gaze continuing to rivet itself upon the window, his companion, half in earnest, half in jest, could not refrain from saying—"Why, Marquis, you look as if you had seen a ghost !"

His reply to the observation, for reply it was, proved a curious one : letting the lady's arm drop, he broke away from her and, making his way against the current now streaming out of the gallery, got round to the other side of the table, and only halted on reaching the window that had so strangely attracted his attention. But nothing was there—the recess, with its grey horse on the one side and its black on the other, was quite empty. "Strange !" he muttered to himself as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Then he looked down the long gallery towards the folding-doors through which the last of the guests were sweeping, and with a "Ha, there she is again !" hastily strode down the apartment. Had he really seen a ghost ? Was it a trick ? Was it hallucination ? Guido asked himself the questions but could find no answer.

Whatever it might be, there she was again, beckoning to him from just within the great open folding-doors, apparently unnoticed by the lackeys who were now passing ; yet most clearly visible to himself—his aunt Orsola, as he had seen her a hundred times in life, her earnest eyes fixed upon him, and beckoning him to approach. But also on reaching the doorway no aunt was there—none but guests gathered in little groups, some sitting, others standing, a few wandering idly about.

A chance move gave him a glimpse of the further doorway, and there, just within the next saloon stood the figure again, her eyes upon his, her hand signing to him to follow.

And so he did—through saloon after saloon, threading his way as best he could, and heedless of greeting or remark—alive only to the feeling of terrible anxiety that had now taken possession of him.

On till he found himself in the "Guards' Saloon." There, at the door opening upon the grand staircase, stood the figure, this time with a frown upon its brow and impatience in the motion of its hand.

Out upon the landing—down the broad steps—across the vestibule—out into the court. There before him, under the full blaze of the gas, stood the figure in the bronze gateway, pointing eagerly across the piazza to the hotel opposite.

This time, however, it waited till he had approached within a few feet, and then, with a wild wave of the hand towards the Albergo, suddenly vanished.

What had happened—what was happening there, within those walls ? To cross the piazza, enter the hotel, and mount the broad stairs two at a time was the work of but a few seconds. There he found himself face to face with a sleepy waiter in a huge cloak who, startled from his doze upon the broad divan upon which he had been "keeping guard," now stood staring at him with eyes stretched to their widest extent, as

if to impress conviction, not only of being really awake, but also of never having been asleep at all.

Guido snatched up a candlestick, lighted the taper at the gas and, without entering his own apartment, strode across to the door of the room occupied by Brigitta and his son.

No reply to his knock. He repeated it ; but with a like result. Then, putting his hand to the lock, to his surprise the door yielded to his touch. He entered.

With a loud cry he sprang over the form of old Brigitta just within, crossed the room at a bound, and tore aside the hangings of the bed. Just in time, too ; for there, upon a side table, and in fearful proximity to the curtains, stood a lighted candle. A minute or two later the bed would have been in a blaze.

Fortunately the hangings were of mixed silk and wool—yet even as such, they had begun to smoulder in one spot which the long yellow flame of the candle seemed straining upwards to reach and lick. To crush out the danger and remove the light was but short work. Then he rang the bell for assistance.

Brigitta was raised, carefully carried to a sofa, and a doctor sent for. She had had a sort of fit—not a dangerous one in itself, though its consequences might have been terrible—and having felt unwell, had risen to reach the door, which she had only just been able to unlock before falling.

By the time the Marchioness got back, things had been pretty well restored to order.

Brigitta had been blistered and bled, and little Guido, wide awake and rejoicing, was sitting up in bed, gleefully examining every part of the armour in which "papa" was yet encased.

Brave as he was, he could not repress a shiver when his wife entered the room, so exact a counterpart—save in the jewels—of the form he had so lately seen, and which had rendered him such signal service. "Guido," whispered the Marchioness as she sat down beside her husband, "even after death dear Aunt Orsola has shown herself the best friend we ever had."

"Yes, indeed, darling ! But for her——"

His voice grew husky, and he bent and passionately kissed his son. A more eloquent conclusion than any words could have been.

"Say 'God bless Aunt Orsola,'" whispered the Marchioness to her boy.

"God bless Aunt Orsola," repeated he in his clear, childish treble. As sincere an "Amen" as ever passed human lips fell from the grateful parents as they both bent over the child on whose behalf so mysterious an intervention had been so mercifully vouchsafed.

A. B.

IN THE VALE OF THE WHITE HORSE.

BY ROSA MACKENZIE KETTLE, AUTHOR OF "SMUGGLERS AND FORESTERS," ETC.

ABOVE the tops of the trees bordering the yew-tree walk in the Rectory garden, as I paced up and down, in my girlhood, somewhat disconsolately in the sombre shadow, I could see the stone battlements and turrets of an old Manor House.

I had been spending the summer with a married sister, several years older than myself. She and her excellent husband were devoted to parish work and each other. I must confess that I often felt dull and lonely. The Berkshire lanes as autumn approached were as muddy and intricate as when Wayland Smith and the hapless Countess traversed the district. I had no companion to tempt me—no inducement to wander far—I may as well own at once that I was not a strong, active-minded woman.

In my idle moods I often wove stories about the neighbouring mansion, which now stood empty, but in other days was often full of gay company. Its last owner had been a mighty hunter, with whom, as was then customary, the clergyman was on intimate convivial terms; hunting, shooting, and afterwards dining and supping together.

Now in both cases times and men were changed. My grave brother-in-law did not indulge in field-sports, or care to drain the wine-cup; and the present lord of the manor was a young man, a great traveller, who spent his time in foreign countries or in London, and seldom visited this rural district.

It was not to the days of the fox-hunting squire and parson that my thoughts turned, as I walked beneath the yew trees, or sat in an old-fashioned arbour at the end of the long walk; but to tales I had heard of an ancestor who kept open house when at home, and distinguished himself in love and war, in camps and courts, when abroad.

An illustrious lady figured in these country-side traditions. Her portrait, it was said, hung side by side with that of the gallant soldier and accomplished cavalier, who, when days of exile followed the fulfilment of her ambitious dreams, had often been her host at the old house in the Vale. There was a mystery about the old place, and though I had been staying for months, close by it at the Rectory, I had never been admitted within its walls. Once only had my sister and I been allowed to pass, through those usually fast-closed gates, into the secluded grounds of the ancient mansion; and even then we were closely pursued and vigilantly watched. Pheasants rose on whirling

wings as we walked under trees whose boughs swept the ground ; hares and rabbits scudded along, scared at the unwonted sound of footsteps, though, involuntarily, we trod softly on that charmed ground.

Squirrels came down from the pine-tops to gaze at us, and chatter to us. I think they would have liked to prolong the interview and conversation, but we were hurried on remorselessly, in order not to disturb the game. We dared not linger.

"Is no one allowed to see the inside of the old house?" I asked in a whisper, as we turned back reluctantly, at the bidding of our taciturn, somewhat surly conductor. "Are there no family pictures, no curious relics shut up in those old rooms? One would think that in its owner's absence we might be permitted to enter."

"No, the house is always shut up," replied the Rector, speaking, perhaps unconsciously, in the same low awe-struck tone. "In my grandfather's life-time, my predecessor in the parish, I have often gone inside the doors. Hospitality was then the order of the day. But sport and politics were the topics of conversation. One might as well have been at a London club or at a race or coursing meeting, instead of in a house full of interesting memories."

"There are legends and traditions, I know, about the old place." I said eagerly, "Is it haunted?"

"Possibly," said my grave brother-in-law with a smile. "I never stayed till the witching midnight hour. Perhaps the polished courtier, the gallant cavalier, may go his rounds in the hushed night. Or a certain noble lady, who was often his honoured guest, may hold revels in his ancient halls. I cannot tell. I have never stayed late enough to meet them. As you know, I am not a sportsman or card-player, and from what I remember of the style of conversation in former days, the guests at the Manor House were not men troubled about spiritual manifestations. Ladies were not often invited ; but I daresay your sister has heard more than I can remember about those festive gatherings in the olden time ; I always came away early. The present owner is a different style of man, cultured and intellectual, but we see very little of him in the Vale."

"Does he not care to visit the Manor House?" I asked. "It always grieves me to see a fine old place deserted and undervalued."

"Only for a few weeks later in the year, during the shooting season," replied my brother-in-law. "There is no establishment kept up. That young man's mother, the housekeeper, has charge of the place. You will hear noise enough when there is a party at the great house, and shooting in the covers. My wife went out for the day rather than hear the guns last year. We had made friends with an old cock-pheasant who came to feed on our lawn, and Emmeline was greatly distressed when she heard the firing close by, and made me take her to the village. But when we returned home, the servants told us that, at the first gun-shot, the fine old fellow went to roost on his tree-top.

and slept through the disturbance. There he is, I declare, sitting on the gate-post! I do not believe that he will move an inch."

The prediction was verified. The stately bird sat calmly, while the Rector quietly opened the gate on our return home, without disturbing his serenity, or even ruffling his plumes.

A few evenings afterwards we were vexed by the disappearance of my sister's favourite cat, whose constant practice it was, when the dinner-bell rang, to tap at the casement window, and take her place at the table opposite to me where a plate was always laid for her. I never could help smiling when the footman wheeled round one of the morocco-covered dining-room chairs for my opposite neighbour; but now I was sorry to miss her. She always conducted herself quite in a ladylike manner, and expected a clean plate when ours were changed.

"If you please, madam, one of the keepers is much grieved, but your cat has been poaching, and is badly hurt by being caught in a snare," was the painful intelligence that greeted us when we rose from table.

My sister opened a window, outside of which a young man was standing, holding a furry bundle, much bespattered with mud, very tenderly in his arms. It was the same under-keeper who had conducted us through the grounds of the Manor House with, as I thought, churlish rapidity.

He now looked more benign, and helped us to place poor wounded pussy in a fur-lined basket, her own especial property, which stood on the wide window-seat.

While we were thus engaged a low grumbling sound startled us, and, looking up, we saw the real Simon Pure, our own domestic treasure, glaring at the interloper installed in her sanctuary, the muddy condition of the injured stranger having prevented our recognising the mistake.

A hearty laugh followed, a hamper lined with straw was fetched from the office and the invalid removed in it to the stables, where it was carefully tended.

Muff sniffed disdainfully at her desecrated couch. It required much coaxing and reasoning to induce her to take an amiable view of the matter, and resign herself to peaceful slumber in her warm, comfortable resting-place.

I had been spending a long, sultry, slumberous day quite alone at the close of August; the Rector and my sister were attending a parish meeting; the book I had been trying to read had fallen from my hand on the bench under the yew trees; the dull old Rectory was even quieter than usual.

Suddenly a man's footstep on the gravel startled me. First impressions are often erroneous; I had noticed the kind manner in which

the young underkeeper handled the poor bruised animal. Now he stood, cap in hand, respectfully, smilingly, waiting to accost me.

"If you would like to see the inside of the Manor House, madam," he said, "I have the keys, and I shall be happy to show you over it. It is your last chance," he added; "the master and some friends will arrive to-morrow; my mother is gone to F—— to engage servants, and provide for a large party of guests, so I am left in charge for a while."

I seemed still rather hazy, and my conductor was as usual in a hurry, having, he said, many duties to attend to. It did not occur to me to leave any message: I followed my guide, who had relapsed into silence, through the dusky woodlands like one in a dream.

It was late in the afternoon of a cloudy day, and the Manor House looked dark and gloomy; I wished that I could have seen it with the sun shining in through the deep mullioned windows, and glinting on the picture-frames. Room after room, often in the old-fashioned style communicating with each other, galleries and corridors, were passed through in the dim light, so quickly that I retain only faint impressions of that first hasty survey: I had scarcely time to notice their contents. At last a pause was made in a large, very antique-looking library. Bookshelves were let into the walls, framed in oak black with age, the pictures were bordered with the same sombre material, and looked as if they could never reflect a ray of sunshine. An ancient oval mirror above the black marble mantelpiece gave back elongated images like a spoon; my feet sank deep in a piled carpet, and a dark velvet couch seemed to extend its arms to welcome a tired person.

"May I sit down," I said, timidly; "I am very weary."

"By all means," said my conductor promptly; "I was about to ask if you would object to my leaving you for a short time. I have several duties to perform, and you will like to look about you; I will return and take you home before nightfall."

He was gone before I could reply; the unwonted sensation of fatigue and drowsiness which crept over me made me rejoice in the proffered rest. I felt too tired to examine the many curious details of the old book-room, or to notice that the key was turned in the lock after my self-constituted guardian had closed the door. I do not know how long I remained in that state of semi-consciousness. The first thing that roused me was the sound of shots at no great distance. I got up and went to the window; but the gloom of evening had fallen on the park, the outlines of great clumps of trees and shrubs, of massive single oaks and beeches, and tall pine trunks, with flat dark tops, were dimly visible in the twilight. I waited, patiently at first, then rather anxiously, for my guide, but no one came.

I began to reflect that my sister would be uneasy about me, if she returned from the village and found me absent, and I resolved to find my way home alone. But when I went to the door it was fast locked. I was a prisoner.

I did not feel much alarmed on my own account, but I was sorry

that I had left no message. No one knew of my departure. Certainly no one was likely to suspect that I was passing the evening in the usually prohibited precincts of the Manor House.

As well as the fading light permitted I examined the dim old room. Family portraits hung at intervals in panels between the rows of books. One of these caught the last gleam of daylight—a knightly figure in Cavalier costume with long, dark, love-locks, and a hat with drooping feathers. His slender hand rested on the mane of a spirited charger, a tiny spaniel of King Charles's breed was sportively jumping up at his knees.

Next to this picture, receding into darkness, was the portrait of a lady with a diamond coronet on her haughty brow. She had a little dog, of the same royal breed as the Cavalier's pet, in her arms, the rich lace of her sleeves falling over his curly hair.

There was not a sound to be heard. No one seemed stirring. I knocked as loudly as I could on the door, and, at last, ventured to pull a bell-rope by the fire-place, but no one answered to the appeal. It grew darker and darker. Night gradually closed in upon me. The sensation of weariness returned. I threw my hat and scarf on a table, sank down upon the velvet couch, and after some time fell asleep.

I could scarcely believe that my eyes served me truly when, on opening them in broad daylight, I saw the Cavalier with the dark love-locks, or some one very like him, only not in the same picturesque costume, bending over me. Neither could I trust my ears, which seemed to hear the little King Charles's spaniel yelping and barking, as it jumped up and down on the thick piled carpet.

The sun, low in the east, was flooding the room with light. Its rays glinted in the oval mirror, on the knobs of the book-shelves, and the frames of the family pictures. But the brightest beam was reflected in the laughing dark eyes which met my first wondering glance.

It was not a Cavalier of the Stuart's time—not Prince Rupert—not the ghost of his sailor-brother, Prince Maurice, who stood before me: but a gentleman in a modern travelling dress of simple form and fashion, with no jewellery or lace ruffles; but with the noble brow, clearly cut features, and slender white hand, with tapering fingers, of an ancient race.

He was gazing at me with surprise equal to my own, and the little dog was half wild with excitement.

"In the name of all that is wonderful, how came you here?" he exclaimed, as in shamefaced astonishment, feeling myself blush crimson under his gaze, I tried to rise.

"No, don't disturb yourself. You looked so delightfully comfortable: I wish I had not awakened you. May I venture to ask whether you dropped down from the skies?"

"Or slipped through the key-hole, or down the chimney;" I said, recovering my self-possession. "No, I came to view the inside of

this curious old house. One of the keepers, who saw that I wished to do so, invited me in and left me here. I do not know what has become of him. He locked the door and I could not get out."

A shade passed over the laughing face, and darkened the gleaming eyes.

"Some miscreants, who were after the game, took aim at him in the dusk; you might have heard the shots."

I did remember, then, the sounds which had startled me out of my first brief unconsciousness.

"He is badly wounded, and we thought him delirious. He seemed trying to tell us something about a lady, and anxious about her, but we could make nothing out of it. His mother, who is my house-keeper, is gone to his lodge to help in nursing him."

"Oh, I hope he is not dangerously hurt," I said. "He was very kind in wishing to indulge my desire to see this ancient mansion. I trust I am not the cause of his suffering."

"No, no, it is not your fault, and I am the gainer," the young man said. "It is not often that this dull old house is blest with such a bright visitant. Did you see any ghosts before you fell asleep?"

"Nothing more spectral than those old pictures, which, in the gloaming, half-frightened me;" I said. "Now I will relieve you of my involuntary presence, and go back to the Rectory."

"I am glad we are such near neighbours;" said my host, whilst I took up my hat and scarf from the table near me and hurriedly put them on.

"Let me help you, and take care of you across the park. Not that there is any danger now, as poor Jerrold thought there might have been, no doubt, if you walked home alone; that must have been his reason for locking you in, meaning to return in a short time and release you. The fray last night ended in the capture of the ringleaders of a gang of as lawless rascals as ever infested these woodlands. Owing to an accidental circumstance, which brought me down here twenty-four hours before I was expected, I was just in time to take part in the scuffle, which nearly cost a brave, faithful young fellow his life; do not trouble about it. He is doing well now, and will recover more quickly when I relieve his mind of anxiety about his fair prisoner."

I did not refuse the offered escort. I was still trembling with excitement, and glad to lean on the kindly proffered arm of my new friend. Nor was that the only time it was my stay. Many were the walks in the woodland which followed that morning stroll over the dewy grass. First of all there was the young keeper to visit, and though he was no longer raving, he persisted in calling me "The Mistress." It did him good, he said, to see that I was none the worse for the night's adventure, and for being locked up in the old library. Then I must revisit the Manor House with my sister, and inspect all its treasures. The little spaniel always tried to get hold of the skirt of my

dress and pull me to the door of the room where we had so strangely so wonderingly made each other's acquaintance. I tried to resist its efforts. I did not want to revive the memory of such a ludicrous adventure, but circumstances were too strong for me; Emmeline wanted to see the room where I had spent the night when she was so terribly alarmed at my disappearance. By degrees my confusion wore off, and I did not shrink from and shun the revival of the strange coincidence of events. The library had a certain charm for me. The guests at the Manor House were of a quieter order than those who, in the old squire's life-time, had wearied my grave brother-in-law with fox-hunting stories and card-playing.

The new master was, as the Rector had said, a man of a different stamp—not less manly, nor less lively, but more thoughtful and of a higher type. They soon became fast friends, and the traveller's experiences threw new light on the book-lore of his studious neighbour.

The parties at the Manor House were not now exclusively confined to the masculine element. Emmeline was frequently asked for counsel, and invited to play the part of hostess, and I, of course, accompanied and assisted her.

On one occasion, when the library was brilliantly lighted up, a strong contrast to its eerie state when night darkened there over my loneliness, I sat down apart from the rest of the company on the dark velvet couch, with the little King Charles's spaniel in his favourite position at my feet.

The young keeper had quite recovered, and had been promoted to a higher function. He was in great favour, which he chose to attribute to me. Whenever we met his face beamed with joy and gratitude.

"Do you not think, Honoria, that this sombre old Manor House would be all the better for a blithe young mistress?" said its owner, who had drawn near to tell me that the new head-keeper had been inquiring after "the mistress," and wanted to see and to thank me for his promotion. "You spent one night, not unhappily, under its roof. Cannot you make up your mind to brave the ghosts of Cavaliers and illustrious ladies and spend the rest of your life within its walls?"

The little dog barked and jumped coaxingly up into my lap. Eyes full of truth, and love, and happiness looked down pleadingly into mine, and I answered both appeals in one short word. "Yes."

THE MAJOR'S MISTAKE.

I.

"I ADMIT, sir, that this is a matter on which I have no right to speak with authority; but still I maintain that between husband and wife there should be no secrets."

And the Major leant back in his arm-chair.

"Well spoken, and like the true old bachelor that you are," laughed our host, Mr. Northcote. "But you might have been forced to change your views had you not taken good advice that night of the Cape Town Ball! Eh, Major?—That was before you went out to the Cape, my young friend," he added, turning to me.

"Your maxim is excellent, Major Morton," I replied, for the Major's remark was more particularly addressed to me. "But like most maxims it breaks down under peculiar and unusual circumstances."

"I cannot agree with you, sir," said the Major, somewhat stiffly. "A just law knows no exceptions."

"May I tell you the case of an intimate friend of my own," I said, "and ask you whether in that particular instance your maxim would not break down?"

"Certainly," replied the Major. And he lit another cigar.

"My friend was making a fair income in business, and married. All went well for awhile. And no husband and wife in England were happier or more united than they. Then came a period of depression. There was no life in trade, and business was slack. My friend and his wife had to pinch to make two ends meet."

"And thought themselves particularly ill-used by fate, I suppose," puffed the Major through his cigar.

"Things went from bad to worse. My friend grew more and more worried and harassed. His wife's heart ached to see how ill and wretched he looked. At last things came to a crisis. He told her that he had been a fool and worse; had speculated with the little capital they possessed; had lost all and more. Unless he could raise some three or four thousand pounds—and what hope had he of that?—their little home would be theirs no more."

"Three or four thousand pounds—eh?" growled the Major.

"Yes, and that without security. As you may suppose, he tried in vain to raise such a sum. Ruin and disgrace stared him in the face."

"Serve him right," ejaculated our host. But the Major was silent.

"And then one evening as he sat gazing into the fire, moody and utterly dejected, his wife came and knelt by his side, and lifted bright tearful eyes to his face, and said: 'I have never kept a secret from you,

dear, till now. No, not one. This is my first secret and, I pray, my last! Promise me never to ask how I came by this,' and she placed in his hands a draft for five thousand pounds."

The Major had risen and was pacing the room.

"When did this happen, and where?" he asked excitedly. "In England or at the Cape? And who is your friend? I have a right to know."

"But I, sir, have not the right to tell," I answered, astonished and somewhat bewildered by the effect of my story.

Mr. Northcote and I looked at each other inquiringly, as the Major continued pacing up and down the library, followed by enormous clouds of smoke. But my host was apparently as mystified as I was.

At last the Major stopped by my chair and said:

"Forgive me, sir; your story forcibly reminded me of a scene in my own life. I believe it to be true, and to have happened ten years ago, not in England, as your friend may have led you to suppose, but at the Cape. Do you know your friend's address?"

"I do," I answered; and as I stood and looked into his face I somehow grew to like this strange man whom I had known but for one short hour.

"And his wife—she who so nobly kept the secret—she is—*is*—living—and—well?"

"She is, and is in England," I replied, wondering at the break in his voice.

"Good! Write and tell her—*her*, remember, not him—that Major Morton would gladly see her. I shall stay in this neighbourhood a week in hopes of a reply.—I'll look in, and talk over old days to-morrow, Northcote," he added, turning to our host. "I'm strangely upset this evening, and will bid you good-night.—Good-night, sir," he said, holding out his hand to me. "You may not tell *me*, but I may tell *you* that your friend's name is Hardy. I have your promise to write to Mrs. Hardy."

"I will tell my friend's wife what you wish," I replied. And he left the room with Mr. Northcote.

II.

MR. NORTHCOTE returned in a few minutes.

"I never saw the dear old Major in such a state before—never, save once," he said. "And by-the-bye, I must apologise for not introducing you formally to him. I thought you had met before. He seemed still more excited just now, when, on his asking me your name, I told him it was Hardy. Was it a brother of yours of whom you told us?"

"No," I replied evasively. "One of our family. The Hardys are numerous, you know. But tell me something about your strange friend."

"Well, to tell you the truth I don't know much about him myself. We saw a good deal of each other some ten or twelve years ago, when we were both at the Cape. And I saved him from making a fool of himself on one occasion. For which, by the way, he was not half so grateful as he ought to have been."

"How so?" I inquired.

"It's really hardly fair on the dear old Major, for no one could help liking him, notwithstanding his simplicity. A very child in business, I assure you. And yet I'm under no promise not to tell, like your cousin's wife. So as you've told the Major your friend's story, I'll give you an opportunity of telling him the Major's."

"Not if you think it should be kept a secret," I said. "You know my views on that subject."

"Why, I don't suppose the Major himself remembers one syllable about it. And there is not much to tell one way or another."

"Then, if it's betraying no secret, tell me by all means; for I feel a strange interest in the man."

"There was a grand ball given in the Exchange in Cape Town, and all the world was there, and the Major among the rest. I remember thinking it rather a bore myself, but going through with it as a matter of duty. When the whole thing was over, and I had sat down in my smoking-room to finish my cigar before turning in, I heard a hurried step outside, and with scarce a knock, in burst the Major, looking even more excited than he was to-night.

"'I want to consult you,' he said; 'can you give me an hour?'

"Of course I consented, though I was horribly tired. I always fancy that the Major, who was an unusually abstemious man, must have taken a glass or two of rather fiery Pontac that evening, and had a little lost his balance.

"'I want to consult you, Northcote,' he said. 'I fear I've done a foolish and a wicked thing to-night. I am engaged to be married.'

"'Goodness gracious, Major!' I cried, 'who on earth to?'

"'That's my business,' he said. 'You can give me your advice without knowing that.'

"'But if the deed's done, what advice can I offer?'

"'If it be a wrong deed, it shall be undone, with the help of God.'

"'Well, then, tell me all the circumstances.'

"Whereupon the Major told me that he had been able to do some few acts of kindness—not worth mentioning, he said—to the girl or her relations, and that he feared she had accepted him that night from gratitude and not from love; with much more to the same effect.

"Of course I saw at once how the land lay. The old Major had enjoyed his glass or two of Pontac—enough to make the blood course freely in his veins,—and had made a fool of himself; proposed to a pretty girl, who was glad enough to accept him for his money, the artful little puss. And now in the cooler morning hours, as the effects of the wine were passing off, and the blood pulsated more quietly in

his veins, he began to find out his mistake, and only wanted a little encouragement to get out of the whole business.

"‘Of course you must get out of it, Major,’ I said. ‘The thing’s absurd. If you take my advice you’ll sit down, now you’re calmer’—for the poor man was looking quite crestfallen—‘and square matters by writing her a comfortable cheque. You say she is not well off. Of course she accepted you for your money. That’s obvious enough. Depend upon it she’ll jump at it. Come. I’ll give you pen, ink and paper. Take my advice and don’t delay a moment.’

"‘Not now, not now,’ he said mournfully. A man, you see, doesn’t care about throwing away a few hundreds even when he’s naturally of an absurdly generous turn like the Major. ‘Not now,’ he said. ‘I’ll see her in the morning.’

"What actually happened I can’t say. But, as I heard nothing more of the Major’s engagement, I suppose he choked off the little lass somehow, and wisely abstained for the future from Pontac. Fortunate thing he consulted a man of the world, eh?"

"Did you ever learn who she was?" I asked.

"Never. There’s no doubt the Major did well to consult me. But somehow we never got on so well together after that. I suppose he could not forget that I knew how he had singed his wings."

III.

It was with aching head and troubled mind that I walked home beneath the midnight stars. I had promised the Major to tell my wife—for it was my own story that I had narrated as that of my friend—that he wished to see her. I had unintentionally learnt her secret, in part at least; and I had also learnt his secret, in part also. But there was still much that was not clear. What course ought I to adopt? I had promised my wife, long ago, never to try in any way to find out the one secret she was forced to keep from me. And yet I could not now rest until I knew all. Was it to the Major that I was indebted for a sum of money which I could not hope to repay for many a long year, even if he would consent to accept it from me? Had I even a right to demand that I should be permitted some day to refund that which was not a loan to myself but a free gift to my wife? One thing alone was clear—to my wife I must make a clean breast of all I had learnt.

She listened with tearful eyes to my account of what had passed, and since I already knew so much she told me all.

She had first met the Major when she was a teacher in a school in Cape Town. She had been irresistibly drawn towards a man who, to her young eyes, seemed a very ideal gentleman; whose perfect courtesy knew no distinctions of rank; who showed a genuine interest in her work; and whose simple straightforward words of advice seemed insensibly to raise her standard of duty.

Her mother at that time was taken ill, with a sickness which was unto death. He noticed her worn and anxious look, and gently asked if she were in trouble. She told him of her mother's illness. He sent presents of wine and fruit: called himself to see them in their cottage home, begged her to send him some flower paintings for a bazaar in which he was interested, and apologised for paying pounds where shillings were expected. In a thousand ways he helped where help was much needed. Then came her mother's death. She saw the Major no more, though kindly presents came to remind her and her sister of his generous heart.


So the time went by till the night of the Exchange ball, and he asked her to be his wife. His gentleness and courtesy, she said, were so exquisite, that she felt if she could not love him like a lover, she could honour him as the prince of gentlemen, and could be happy with him as his wife. If it was not ardent love, it was not mere gratitude that prompted her. It was a deep reverence, and earnest admiration of a man whom she felt to be above all others that she had known—noble and pure, true and unselfish.

And then next day he came to her, and with gentle humility bowed his great iron-grey head before her. He had sinned against God and man, he said, in asking her to be his wife. God's law was like to like; and he was old and grey, she young and in all the pure freshness of early life. Man he knew would blame him, and justly blame him, if he accepted her consent, founded not on fresh young love, but on generous womanly gratitude. For any pain he had caused her, he asked her forgiveness. He was too old to make her happy. His touch would only chill the warmth of her bright young life. And when she told him with quickened breath and trembling voice that she was indeed still his, if so he would, he gently told her that she must not tempt him to sin against his conscience.

A month afterwards he left the Cape. And on the day of his departure wrote to her and said that he had placed in his agent's hands a sum of money to be at her entire disposal should she ever have occasion to need it, under the sole condition that in such a case she should honour him, and him alone, with her confidence.

IV.

It was, I think, some five years after I had learnt my wife's secret—when I had learnt too to reverence the Major's character as she had always revered it—that I was summoned to his death-bed. His last words were of her; and next his heart, suspended by a silken thread, was an old, worn-out watch-key she had once given him in playful mood.



BRETON FISHERMAN'S SONG.

WE were three sailors—sailors of Croix,
We were three sailors—sailors of Croix,
Homeward bound in the *Saint François*.

How the winds blow!

'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so.

He fell overboard in the raging sea,
Overboard and lost in the raging sea!
The other two go sorrowfully.

How the winds blow!

'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so.

His cap was all that they found of him,
His cap and pipe—that they found of him,
Although they looked till their eyes were dim.

How the winds blow!

'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so.

His mother went to the shrine to pray,
His mother went to the shrine to pray;
She prayed to the good Saint Anne d'Auray.

How the winds blow!

'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so.

"Good Saint Anne, give me back my son!

Good Saint Anne, give me back my son!"

The good Saint Anne when her prayer was done—

How the winds blow!

'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so—

The good Saint Anne to her thus replies,
In sorrow and pity to her replies,

"At eve thou shalt meet him in Paradise."

How the winds blow!

'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so.

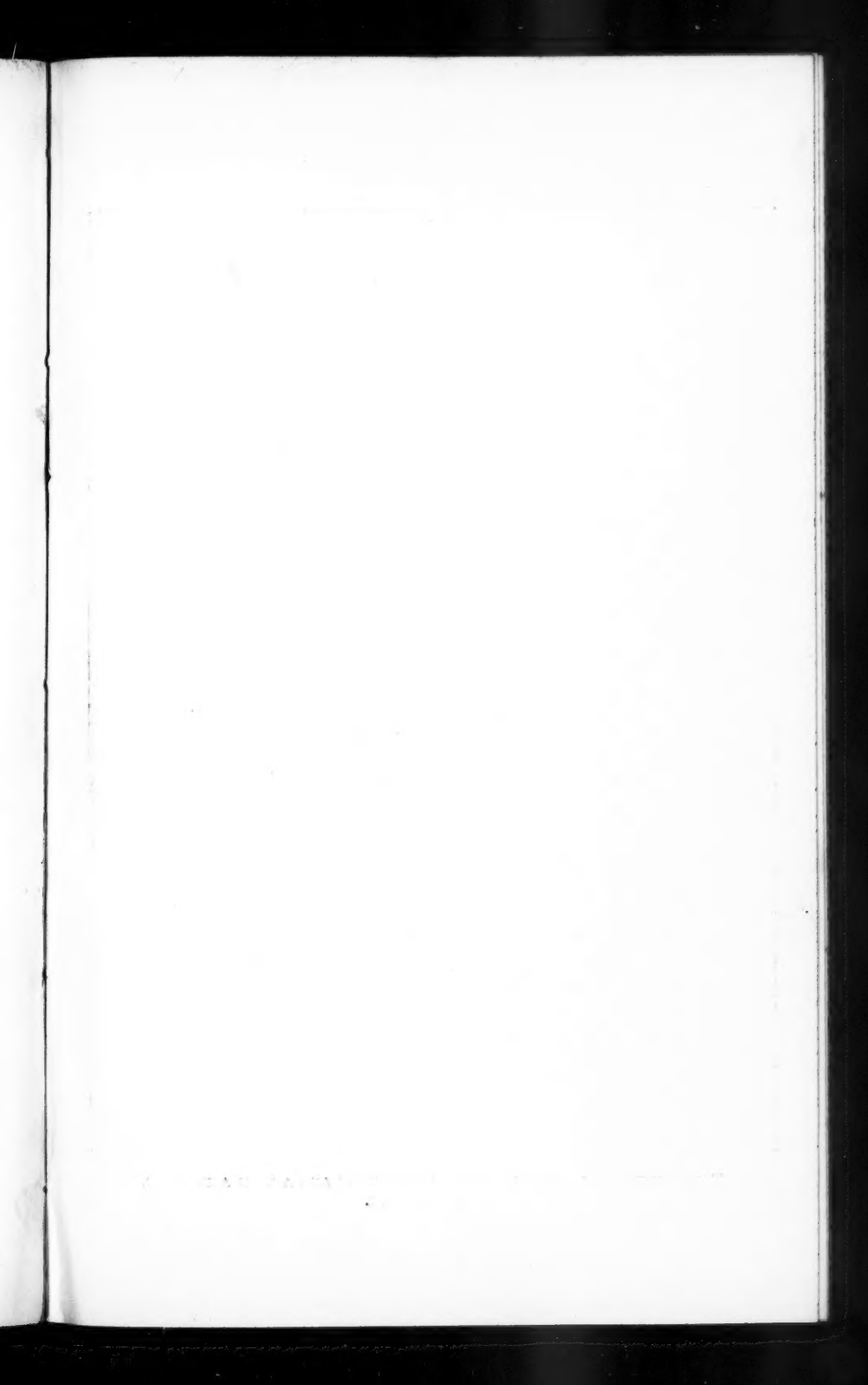
Back to the village she went her way,
In joy and gladness she went her way.

They found her dead at the close of day.

How the winds blow!

'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so!

C. E. MEETKERKE.





THE HOUSEKEEPER, WITH AN ELABORATE CURTSEY AND A THIN ACID SMILE,
TOOK HER LEAVE.

